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BIANCA CAPPELLO.

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

BY

LADY LYTTON BULWER,

AUTHOR OF "CHEVELEY."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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122

BIANCA CAPPELLO.

" A woman's fate lies in a cloud
'Twixt heaven and earth."

UNPUBLISHED PLAY.

" There is a lesson in every life, and warning in too many."

Capt. Maryatt's POOR JACK.

BIANCA CAPPELLO.

CHAPTER I.

“ My masters, are you mad ? or what are you ? Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty, but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night ? ”—SHAKESPEARE.

“ Give place ye lovers here, before,
That spent your boasts and brags in vain ;
My lady's beauty passeth more
The best of yours I dare well faine,
Then doth the sun the candle light,
Or brightest day the darkest night.”
LORD SURREY.

“ THE Bucentoro to a ducat, fair sirs, but I'll prove it ; or there shall be a coffin the more and a man the less in Venice, before yon moon be many hours older,” said the foremost of a gay set of *cavalieri*, who were disembarking at a bridge, where now stands the Rialto, on a fine night of the carnival in the year 1560.

“Methinks thy wager is none of the fairest, Pietro, considering there might be a difficulty in getting our good old doge Priuli to lay the odds, for a doge without a bucentoro would be like a snail without a shell, a woman without a tongue, a Frenchman without vanity, or any other *lusus naturæ*.”

“Borgia is right,” said a third speaker; “so, till we can put it to the vote, let us toss up for it at the *Taverna delle tre Grazie*: beauty, you know, is all a toss-up in this world, and generally depends upon the die of opinion for its currency.”

“Is it a match, *Signori*?” cried the first speaker, withdrawing a well-filled purse from his girdle, and shaking it above his head.

“Yes, yes—agreed!” replied all the young men simultaneously; “and now to the *Tre Grazie*!”

“Softly,” said Ernesto Vasi, the young noble who had proposed leaving fate to decide, by a cast of the die, the dispute in question—“softly; it should be somewhere here about that the father of one of the *donzelle*, honest Giovanni Ferrai, plies his glittering trade; but what are the frail chains that he makes, compared to the ponderous ones his fair daughter, the peerless, Arianna forges!”

“Prithee, sweet friend,” laughed Filippo Borgia, gently laying his hand upon the young

man's shoulder, "quell that hurricane of love, or your sighs may chance to blow good Master Giovanni's shop off the bridge into the sea, and so leave the corse of the fair Arianna, like a priceless gem, to deck Priuli's ancient bride, the Adriatic."

"Ha!" cried Vasi, heedless of his friend's banter, "it is no hour for purchases, and yet, by the soul of San Antonio, yonder issues a cavaliero from Ferrai's!"

"Certes," responded Borgia, following with his eye the direction in which Ernesto pointed, "and despite all the masks in Venice, that cloak and walk should belong to none other but Vittorio Cappello, the brother of our second Venus—or rather Bonaventuri's, for he plays the Paris to Bianca's charms more than any of us. Ho, Cappello!" continued he, springing forward, and touching with the hilt of his rapier the back of a person who was walking rapidly, yet stealthily, in the shade, on the other side of the bridge, "we know you, great sir, notwithstanding the disguise you would put between us and your nobility, which nathless needs your countenance just now, for what think you of the precedence of its brightest gem being staked upon the juggle of a die, against a pretty bit of plebeian flesh and blood? The mooted point is this: if beauty versus beauty again should run

a tilt, who'd gain the prize—Bianca Cappello, or her fair foster-sister, Arianna Ferrai? We're for San Marc's, to decide the matter by a cast of the die at the *Tre Grazie*, and whichever fortune favours, she shall bear the palm, despite all separate judgments."

"Well met!—a right sapient mode of deciding so critical a matter. Why, Solomon was a Midas to you in point of wisdom, sirs," said the haughty young patrician, pausing in his onward course, and turning back with apparent alacrity to join the group of cavalieri, while his mask effectually concealed his lowering brow and sharply bitten nether lip; and the slight symptom of irritability that might have been discernible in the hasty twitch with which he arranged his collar, was so completely merged in the bland and habitual dissembling of his manner, that none observed it; for, young as he was, Vittorio Cappello was one of those reversed characters that may be styled "Nature's diplomatists," whose hearts are grey while their years are green, and whose very infancy is never guilty of that superstition of noble minds—a belief in the existence of virtue.

"You cannot expect," continued he, "that I should let slip my dragons of chivalry to champion my sister's charms, so I must perforce take the other side; but still, I'll see fair play

by Bianca. How stand the suffrages? Which scale preponderates? that fair *Giglio** Arianna and her father's gold, or my queen-like sister and the blood of the Cappellos?

"Nay," said Borgia, "had Chance, that un-discerning god of this world, inscribed you in the book of fate as lover instead of brother, you must on this occasion hear the truth, so in all courtesy be it spoken, Arianna is in the ascendant—or would be, but for the valour of one true knight, whose hot tempestuous zeal outweighs a whole tournament of ordinary champions."

"Ah, is it so?" bowed Cappello. "By what name then may I admire so much discrimination and gallantry?"

"By a marvellous good name, for the latter calling. Pietro Bonaventuri!—stand forth, man, and receive the tribute of your liege lady's next a-kin," said Borgia, playfully, pushing the young man into the middle of the narrow street they were traversing in their way to San Marc's.

"Surprise must circle my thanks, replied young Cappello, with a withering hauteur of tone, that even his wonted simulation could not soften, "for I was not aware that the Signor Pietro Bonaventuri had even seen *my sister*!"

* Lily.

“Nothing more natural,” said Vasi, good-naturedly; “you forget that the Casa Salviati adjoins the Palazzo Cappello—nay, that the orange blossoms of the one garden intermingle with those of the other, and kiss over the wall in the prettiest manner imaginable, while the very same bee makes love to them both—a sad example, by the bye, for us discreet young men;—but if you do forget this, surely you cannot forget the glittering ducats in good Master Salviati’s counting house, so often tendered to you by the respectable hands of Signor Baptista Bonaventuri, our friend Pietro’s uncle; and you might as well expect a man to be three years in Venice, and not have heard of the inquisition, or seen San Marc’s, as to have lived next door to your fair sister for a year, and not have seen her. Is it not so, Pietro?”

“As you say, Ernesto,” replied Bonaventuri, with as much acrimonious *hauteur* as Cappello had used in addressing him; “but though *I* may not presume to boast of *my* acquaintance with so noble a lady, yet my glove was more fortunate, for at the fête given a month back by the French ambassador, it had the honour of touching hers in the Volta several times.”

Cappello, who, like all proud, or, more properly speaking, arrogant people, had a proportionate counterpoise of meanness, much as he

despised the banker, by no means despised the bank, and as Salviati was in those days the Rothschild of Europe, and Baptista Bonaventuri his factotum—by an alchymy of reasoning, which was instantaneous in transmuting contempt into policy—he remembered that if the uncle was obstinate, as he often was in advancing repeated loans, the nephew might be made a very useful agent, if well managed and duly played up to, in obtaining the mercantile dross of which his aristocratic necessities stood so often in need: therefore, no sooner had Pietro concluded his nettled reply, than, with a frankness that would have baffled the most microscopic powers of penetration, and a voice of the most silvery sweetness, he hastily pulled off his glove, and extending his hand to Bonaventuri, said—

“Signor Pietro, the regard I have for your worthy uncle makes me feel that *my* hand has some right to improve upon the acquaintance that my sister’s glove commenced.”

Bonaventuri was not deceived by this sudden display of friendship on the part of the proverbially haughtiest noble in Venice, but it suited his purpose to affect to be so: as in the point of self-control, where his own interest or wishes were concerned, he was as great an adept as Cappello; and he had not studied commerce

under such a *gran maestro* as Salviati, without duly registering in that most accurate of ledgers—his memory—a debtor and creditor account of all the insults he received and apparently endured from the young Venetian nobles, who suffered his companionship for the sake of the ducats he contrived to supply them with, and which, in a measure, reconciled them to the young merchant's singularly handsome person and fascinating address, which otherwise they would have found, and even as it was often did find, marvellously inconvenient and detrimental in many of their schemes and adventures.

“To be hand in glove with a Cappello, is too much honour for the ignoble Tuscan blood of a Bonaventuri,” said the Florentine, with a slight tone of sarcasm, as he received Vittorio's proffered hand.

“Nay, good Pietro, merit makes the man, whatever patents of nobility the accident of birth may confer; and so generous a spirit as common fame awards thee, enrols thee at once among the highest nobles—those of Nature's making: so prithee no more heraldry between us; and if you have the courage to brave the step-mother hospitality of the Palazzo Cappello, let us be friends.”

“‘Good wine needs no bush,’ says the proverb,” said Borgia; “and all Venice knows that

of the Casa Cappello to be excellent; but your worthy padrone, Signor Bartoloméo, seemed to think that such choice beverage *did* need a bramble, to prevent the *profanum vulgus* making too free with it, or he never would have set up the sign of your illustrious step-mother, the Signora Elena."

"It must be confessed," laughed Vittorio, still directing all his attention to Bonaventuri, "that the very worst flask of damaged Alcatico in your native city you would find nectar, compared to my step-dame's looks, which seem the result of the combined influences of daggers and crab-apples."

"Mind your heads—mind your heads, Signori!—that is, keep them out of my way, for I hate empty compliments," cried a *scaramuccia*—who was whisking about two bladders at the end of a stick—as they turned into the Piazzo San Marco, and found themselves in the thick of the masks.

"Heads! who talks of heads?" said a tall figure, dressed as a magician, with a long white beard at the end of his mask, a conical cap, a long violet-coloured robe, studded with golden stars, a girdle composed of the signs of the zodiac, and a small stuffed serpent, which he twisted about in his hand—"Who wants them may choose, for here is a goodly show.

Some are made to be broken—others to be crowned—some few to think, and many to be turned ; but here is one,” continued the figure, lightly raising the plume of Bonaventuri’s hat with the head of the serpent, “that will be thought of some value ere long, and fetch more ducats than its owner ever could command.”

“A merry varlet and a shrewd one ; for, by Plutus ! Pietro, he guesses your calling, and foretels you will rise in it,” said Borgia.

“Ah ! is it so, friend ?” said Bonaventuri to the figure. “Tune your prophecy in that key, for I am fond of rising, provided it be not early o’ mornings—ha ! ha ! ha ! But when, how, and where will my humble cranium become of such value ?”

“*Sciocco !* know you not that some men’s heads die with more decorations than they are born with ?” muttered the figure, who immediately mingled with the crowd, and was out of sight in a moment.

“Ha ! ha ! ha !—then by Dian and a quiet life, with such a warning staring me in the face, I’d forswear Hymen altogether, and let him buy his fools at some other market !” cried Cappello.

“Who wants to live for ever ?” vociferated a quack doctor—advancing in the centre of a table that was fastened round him, and covered with phials and small boxes—“who wants to live for ever ? Let them buy my

specifico universale! Nor does it stop there: it sharpens knives, and blunts misfortunes—makes cats honest, and husbands faithful—softens the skin, and hardens the heart—teaches diplomacy to geese, and candour to foxes—makes cavalieros pious, and cardinals gallant—misers generous, and spendthrifts economical—old women young, in their own opinion, and young ones old, in the ways of the world—intoxicates water-drinkers, and makes wine-bibbers sober—closes the ears of inquisitors, while it opens the doors of the inquisition—makes hearts light, and purses heavy—puts young souls into old bodies, and old heads upon young shoulders! Such is only the millionth part of the merit of the *specifico universale*, signori! Who'll buy—who'll buy?"

"Dear virgins, take a drop," cried another man, with a basket-full of decanters, containing the very self-same white, vapoury, mysterious-looking fluid that is seen and sold about the streets of Venice to this day. "*Gentilette signorine*," continued he, now holding up a large blown bottle, full of iced water—"only taste my iced water!"

"To the d—l with thy cold water—there will be more demand for it there than here," said a Silenus, mounted on a friend's back, who, scorning all masquerading disguises, did duty as an

ass, and brayed himself and his burden safely through the crowd.

“ *Donne ! donne ! chi vi crede ?* Women ! women !—who believes ye ?” sang, to the wiry trillings of a mandolin, a lachrymose looking youth, in a sad-coloured doublet, who had just been beckoned to the other side of the colonnade by a pretty sylph-like blue domino, who, on his arrival, pushed him into the arms of a very gorgeous representation of his Satanic majesty, and then ran away laughing.

“ Coraggio, Coraggio, Signor Zerbino, whoever you be,” laughed Cappello, “ you are not the first man, and wont be the last by some thousands, who has gone to the d—l after a woman.”

“ Here we are, at last, at the *Tre Grazie*,” said Bonaventuri ; “ and now, Signor Vittorio, your fair sister against the world !”

“ That is better than the world against my fair sister, at all events.”

“ Pazienza—everything in its turn—and that will come too,” said a low, thick voice, with any thing but a Venetian accent.

“ 'Sdeath ! but thy words shall choke thee for a false-tongued villain !” cried Cappello, plunging his hand in his bosom, drawing out a dagger, and darting hastily round, as a tiger does on its prey. But rapid as his movements were, he

was only in time to perceive the more rapidly retreating figure of the magician who had before accosted Bonaventuri. He immediately pursued him, as did Bonaventuri, leaving their companions laughing at their folly in the doorway of the tavern.

“ There—there he goes ! I see the top of his cap !”

“ Where—which way ?—by the Bridge of Sighs, or by the Street of the Canal ?” asked Vittorio.

“ By the Canal,” replied his companion—and both redoubled their speed as they turned into one of the many openings on the Piazza that lead into that darkest, and most puzzling of all labyrinths—the narrow, rectangular, and closely intersected streets of Venice—where they followed on the vague track of rapid footsteps before them.

“ It strikes me,” said Bonaventuri, “ that unless the knave hath the d—l in his heels as well as his tongue, the footfalls before us are much too light to belong to one of his inches. But it is so plaguy dark here since the moon has got behind yon cloud, that eyes are of no manner of use—ears being our only guides.”

“ On—on !” cried Cappello, “ for they tell me that whatever is before us will be at the wharf before we can overtake it.”

And breathless, and swift as arrows, the two young men hurried on till they were stopped by the barrier of a small bridge at one of the wharfs, or stairs, just in time to see, by the light of the moon, which at that moment emerged from a cloud, two slight female figures, closely muffled in black dominos, get into the only gondola that was there, and row rapidly away,—not, however, before they heard a very silvery, but provoking peal of laughter at their expense, while the voice of some invisible person within the gondola exclaimed—

“Andate casa—get home with ye!”—flinging, at the same time, a bunch of flowers at Bonaventuri’s head, much after the fashion that some “desperately minded” individuals fling stones at poor dogs who follow them against their will.

“Nay, by the mass! but the adventure is yours,” said Cappello—not over and above good humouredly—as he saw Bonaventuri, who knew the full value of a carnival bouquet, from whatever quarter it might come, carefully untwist the paper round it, and conceal it in his bosom.

“Yours or mine,” laughed the handsome Florentine, “the game seems scarcely worth the chase!”

“Not so, a little delay only adds a zest to it: it is not as if the billet-doux were at the bottom

of the sea ; but being safe in your custody, all the fool's-errand part of the business is solely mine. So now to the *Tre Grazie*," said Cappello, with a forced laugh. On reaching the Piazza they found the rest of their companions where they had left them, and fully disposed to be merry at their expense.

"Why, man," said Borgia, "what could you expect but your pains for your pains?—he were no conjurer had he allowed you to overtake him ;—besides, I marvel that the dagger of a Cappello should seek to slake its thirst in the rabble blood of a poor carnival knave."

"For that matter," said Vittorio, darting a burning look at Bonaventuri—which, thanks to his mask, the other remained unconscious of—"for that matter, it seems that there is not, after all, so much difference between a Cappello* and a *cappel di fungo*† as I was wont to imagine !"

"Ha ! ha ! ha !—wicked wit !" laughed Bonaventuri, louder than any of them, little dreaming how large a share he had in the sarcasm.

"Ho, Pasquale !" cried Vasi, addressing the tavern keeper, as he entered the tavern of *le Tre Grazie*, which contained the same goodly array

* A cardinal's hat, which is part of the arms of the Cappellos.

† The top of a mushroom.

of Turks and Jews that its successor, the Café Florian, does in these our days—"give us a table in a quiet corner, some dice, and three flasks of your best French wine—that sparkling, foaming liquid, that looks like a bottled rocket, and would turn the whitest liver that ever dangled from a gibbet, into a Chevalier Bayard for the time being."

"Subito—immediately, signor," replied mine host of the *Tre Grazie*; which, practically speaking, meant in Italy then what the same promise does now, namely, "Take patience and wait."

Accordingly, at the end of a quarter of an hour, the champagne was brought, and the table covered with long-stemmed beakers of red and white rayed Venice glass.

"Here," said Bonaventuri, placing under a glass one of two slips of paper on which he had inscribed the names of Bianca Cappello and Arianna Ferrai—"the lady first, and her humble companion after."

"Is this the proper way to keep plebeians in their place?" said Cappello, tapping Bonaventuri's shoulder, with a laugh that had quite as much sarcasm as mirth in it.

"I'm for beauty and fair play,"—said Bonaventuri with apparent good humour, shaking off Cappello's hand, and rattling the dice as though

he thought one lucky throw might change their positions; and then, rolling them on the table with a practised hand, he turned aside his head, as he added, "Look, signori! what says the ivory?—is it on my side or yours?"

"Yours, by Jupiter!" cried the young men simultaneously, "for 'tis sixes."

"Then Fortune has shewn some taste for once," cried Bonaventuri, rubbing his hands exultingly.

"Nay, softly—that says nothing for yours," laughed Cappello, as he replaced the dice in the box to throw for Arianna, "for she's but a blind jade after all, and who knows but she may do as much for Arianna. Is it so?" added he, as the young men crowded to the table to look at the numbers that had turned up. "No; by Saint Antonio, it is only tray-deuce!"

Again, Bonaventuri threw for Bianca, and again fortune was on his side, and so continued till the third and last time, when he was duly proclaimed victor, and Bianca's beauty allowed to be pre-eminent.

More wine was called for, a little gambling was proposed, and as the night advanced, and the weight of Cappello's purse diminished, he proved the sincerity of the friendship he had proffered to Bonaventuri, at the beginning of the evening, by borrowing a hundred ducats from him, which

he had lost to Borgia. His potations having increased as his luck decreased, the small hours found him in no very amiable mood, nor with any more memory than served to give him a confused idea that he was under some sort of obligation to Bonaventuri, and therefore that it behoved him to preserve towards the latter a civil bearing.

Bonaventuri, who, to say the truth, was not only weary of their protracted orgies, but anxious to get home to examine the paper that had been twisted round the flowers which had been thrown to him from the gondola, now proposed departing, "For see," said he, "the day is already breaking."

"Well, let it break, mio caro amico," hiccupped Cappello, passing his arm through Bonaventuri's, as he staggeringly rose from his seat—"let it break, provided it owes the house of Salviati nothing."

As Ernesto Vasi had stated, the Casa Salviati adjoined the Palazzo Cappello, both of which were near the Bridge of Sighs. In those days gondolas were not the funereal looking barges that now are seen flitting across the Adrian Sea, like unhappy spirits through the Elysian fields; but on the contrary, gorgeous, with purple and gold, and brilliant as the shells that might have been found on the shores of Cerigo after the

birth of Venus; forming altogether a fitting court for the regal Bucentoro, as it rose, like a sea-king's palace, proudly above its subject waves, whose allegiance it seemed to claim by the myriad-sceptred sway of the measured strokes of its gilded oars; and as the gondola of every individual in Venice was known by its own peculiar trappings, as modern carriages are by their armorial bearings and liveries, young men bent on midnight revels seldom trusted to so conspicuous a conveyance, but preferred the incognito of the dark streets, unless they could procure a hired one; but those marine hackney coaches were not easily found at so late, or rather early an hour; for which reason Bonaventuri, who had by far the largest portion of his senses about him, proposed walking home with Cappello, and he had no sooner safely deposited him in his bed room, than, before he descended the magnificent staircase of the Palazzo Cappello, he took advantage of the still burning lamp, held by a beautiful statue of Psyche, in the gallery outside Vittorio's room, to inspect the piece of paper that he had so impatiently refrained from looking at till then. It contained only the two following doggerel lines—

“ Love is not love that's born, and dies in thought—
True love dares all, in hopes to conquer aught.”

“I’ faith! a fair challenge,” exclaimed Pietro, aloud—“and if it comes from the quarter I suspect, sweet goddess of my idolatry! you shall have no cause to complain of my want of enterprise.”

Here Bonaventuri’s soliloquy was interrupted by the barking of one of those little dogs which we call Blenheims, but which were then known in Italy by no other name as a race but the very appropriate one of *Favoritas*, though, like their descendants, they had, of course, individual names according to the fancies of their owners; and the little animal in question was now told, by a very sweet but somewhat sleepy voice from within the room at the door of which Bonaventuri was standing, to be quiet by the name of “Tafano,” which command, not being in the first instance obeyed, was followed by another, accompanied by a threat that if he were not a good dog, and did not instantly go to sleep, Titian would not do his picture.

Whether dogs have vanity or not, I shall not pretend to decide, but two things are certain—one is, that Titian never lost an opportunity of immortalizing those little dogs, by introducing them into every picture that he possibly could; and the other is, that Signor “Tafano” instantly became quiet, while Bonaventuri hurried down

stairs, and never stopped till he reached his own apartment, where we will at present leave him, to sleep away the time that it will take us to introduce him a little more particularly to the reader.

CHAPTER II.

“ Sir, you did take me up when I was nothing,
And only yet am something by being yours.”

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

— “ Nature only helpt him, for looke thorow
This whole book, thou shalt find he doth not borrow
One phrase from Greeks, nor Latines imitate,
Nor once from vulgar languages translate.”

DIGGES.

PIETRO BONAVENTURI was the only son of poor but respectable parents, in Florence ; his mother had died in giving him birth, and his father, Giovanni Bonaventuri, worked as a sculptor in a small shop on the Lungo d' Arno. The greatest man of the family—for there is a great man to every family—was Baptista, brother to Giovanni, uncle to the young Pietro, and head clerk to Carlo Salviati, the then greatest banker and merchant in Europe. Like most great men, Baptista had much more im-

portant things to occupy his thoughts than such useless superfluities as poor relations—a species of animal in creation that gave him great doubts as to the fitness of things.

In vain each new year brought him a letter from Giovanni, announcing the growing beauty and capacity of his nephew; it produced no other effect than an always speedy, but laconic answer, stating, that as it had pleased God to afflict his brother with a son, he was glad it was one so perfectly to his satisfaction.

Notwithstanding this want of family patronage, the young Pietro grew in beauty and in favour with the limited circle who enjoyed the honour of his acquaintance. His personal attractions were perhaps the more esteemed, from not bearing any traces of national character; for though his hair was of a purple black, like the rich bloom upon a Tuscan grape, his eyes were blue, and universal linguists; his complexion was delicately fair, with cheeks like young May roses—in whose velvet depths Love might have nestled himself to sleep; his nose was delicately and perfectly chiselled, but indescribable, from being neither Roman, aquiline, nor Greek, though more of the latter, with the exception of the unintellectual expression that Grecian noses invariably possess. No Cupid's bow, that ever was sculptured by art,

or dreamt by poesy, could be more exquisitely perfect than his mouth; and had Cleopatra possessed such pearls as the teeth within it, nothing could have tempted her to make any draught costly at their expense; add to this, there was a sort of regal turn in the manner in which his head was placed on his shoulders; and Nature, as if, proud of so beautiful a work, and determined there should be no discrepancy, completed it with a voice and manner that was irresistible.

One day, when he was about fifteen, his father sent him to carry home a small statue of an Antinous, for which he himself had been the model, to Giorgio Vasari and Cesare Vecellio, the pupils of Titian, and the former a protégé of Cardinal Passerini and of Alessandro and Ippolito de Medici; the artist was at his easel when the boy entered, and the attitude he naturally fell into, as he placed the statue on its pedestal, so struck Vasari that he instantly made a sketch of him; and from that day young Bonaventuri almost deserted his father's studio for that of his new friend and patron, whose friendship, however, did not end with his own good offices, as he introduced him to the favour of the Medici and Cardinal Passerini.

Naturally ambitious, and of a character whose *engouement* and enterprising vivacity, little

scrupulous as to the means by which ends were to be attained, was far more French than Italian, young Bonaventuri soon became intoxicated by the voluptuous atmosphere of the Palazzo Medici; he knew he was admired—nay, more, that he was liked; but in Florence he must always be what he was—the son of a poor sculptor,—a stubborn fact, dark and unlovely, that did not at all harmonize with the glowing pictures of advancement his aspiring imagination had painted; and, like most persons of great imagination without proportionate greatness of mind, his ambition was of a vague and grasping, rather than of a fixed and lofty kind. It was not that settled purpose of the soul prompted by greatness to become greater—that Promethean spark found in some children of earth, which kindles a diviner essence in the clay where it lingers, till all of dross is worn away, and the mortal half becomes a fit temple for the immortal ray within it. No; his was the ambition, or more properly speaking, the restless craving to be known, no matter how—to push on—to find a footing among the high places of this world, where from his physical qualities, coupled with the pliability of his mental ones, he was eminently calculated to shine. Had he been born to the sphere of life he coveted, he had just the temperament to give

him all the negative virtues engendered by indolence and good nature ; as it was, though it might have been difficult to seduce him into cruelty, it would have been easy to tempt him to crime ; tenacity of truth and delicacy of conscience, those invisible fences of virtue, being totally unknown to him.

His father's calling he despised, as he infinitely preferred moulding human beings to inanimate clay, and chiselling out circumstances instead of marble. Neither did the promotion in the church which Cardinal Passerini had offered him, through the medium of an ecclesiastic of the name of Padre Martino, suit with his views, which were to the full as social as they were vague.

Towards the end of the fifteenth century, all Italy was much excited by Lauro Quirini, a Candian, who had brought himself into great notoriety by instructing the Venetians in the ethics of Aristotle, and such were the crowds that he drew, that he was obliged to give his lectures in the public squares. Another philosopher, a Greek, who also preached the peripatetic doctrine at Padua and Florence, of the name of Agyriopoles, secured both fortune and fame in the latter city, by gaining for his pupils the celebrated Angelo Politieno and Lorenzo de Medici, surnamed the Magnificent ; but nothing

lasts in this world, and even peripatetics must come to a stand-still. So Agyriopoles was succeeded by another Greek, Gemistus Pleto, of the sect of Platonists, whose eloquence persuaded Cosimo de Medici to establish a Platonic academy, where every day thousands assembled to hear discussed subjects which had been previously announced by placards all over the city walls.

But fearing that all work and no play might make philosophers as dull as it proverbially does those embryo sages, school-boys, Cosimo also gave the most splendid fêtes to the academicians; the proof of the efficacy of which was, that Cardinal Bessario,—who had followed Cosimo de Medici's example by founding a Platonic academy at Rome, forgot to follow his example in giving fêtes to the academicians; consequently his disciples deserted him: long after which the porch of the Florentine academy, as well as the delicious walks of the Boboli gardens, continued to be crowded.

However, up to this period, the two sects managed to live and lure in peace; but, unhappily, the imp of controversy put it into Pleto's head to write against Aristotle. Whereupon Teodoro Gaza, a zealous peripetician, answered him. Pleto would have rejoined, but death did not give him time to do so; and the

quarrel might have died with him, but that Cardinal Bessario, who had been the pupil of Pleto, thought it incumbent upon him to defend his master, who was no longer capable of defending himself. Gaza was silenced ; but Giorgio Trebizonde had not the same moderation, and he attacked with great violence, not only the Platonic philosophy, but all its followers and partisans ; the Cardinal replied by fulminating another pamphlet against the calumniators of Plato.

In this state of things the forces were nearly equal, when the suffrages of the Sacred College raised to the papal chair Nicholas the Fifth, who was a Platonist ; the weight of such an authority, and the death of George Trebizonde, appeared to put an end to the dispute, when Andrea, his son, revived it, and had for his opponents Marcilo Ficini and Pico de la Mirandole. In short, the pope, the fathers, the universities, and even the cabinets, united against Aristotle ; and his books were not only condemned and burnt, but it was forbidden to preserve a copy of them—and it is no fault of the magnates of that age, if one of the greatest intellects that ever guided human reason was not extinguished totally and for ever ; but to the enthusiastic fanaticism of some few peripatetics we owe its preservation.

The perseverance of this small band of true

disciples finished by triumphing, and in the following century succeeded in dethroning Plato, and re-establishing their master in the possession of all his rights and privileges in the schools; then followed that inexpungeable act in the drama of human life, which makes the oppressed end by being the oppressors.

It would be difficult, as well as superfluous, to attempt to explain the exact cause or causes of this absurd dispute, as it is of little import to establish what Aristotle's exact opinion was on the immortality of the soul and free will; nevertheless, when he had once more regained the ascendant, one of his books was publicly burnt at Venice, in which it was pretended that he did not believe the soul to be immortal. And yet, when Pope Clement the Eighth wished to summon to Rome the Venetian doctor Francesco Patrezzi, to expound the works of Plato, the theologians of his court, having the Cardinal Bellarmine at their head, threw themselves at his feet, to represent to him that the Platonic doctrine was against the true faith, and salvation was only to be found with Aristotle. Thus, in this protracted and ridiculous feud, Italy presented the melancholy spectacle to the world, of men of great intellect and infinite learning abusing both by engaging in a saturnalia of absurdity.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century public excitement and credulity began to seek food from another quarter—namely, the geometrical calculations of Giovanni Antonio Margini, of Padua, whose astrological speculations, grafted upon his astronomical knowledge, future ages have laughed at, but which, in the times he lived, gained him more reputation than his very useful and admirable commentaries on the geography of Ptolemy, or his work on spherical trigonometry, and his theory of the planets, according to the observations of Copernicus; and as no less than three universities—Vicenza, Padua, and Bologna—contended for the advantages of hearing his lectures, he enjoyed to the fullest extent the best, because the present, part of fame—reputation; for reputation is the mortal and corporeal portion of celebrity, which is alone known to its possessor, while fame is the immortal part, which requires death to determine its future existence.

All these succeeding manias convinced Bonaventuri how easy it was to get the public breath to inflate “the bubble reputation.” Now, though he had as little taste for astronomy as he had for ethics, he thought if he could in any way ally himself to Magini or to Paul Nicoletti, who still taught the peripatetic doctrine at Venice, his name might get bruited through the world

coupled with theirs; and could he but once gain his point of going to Venice, and extorting his uncle's patronage, he did not despair of achieving the rest through the medium of Pierio Valeriano Bolzanio—a man of infinite learning, who had been secretary to Leo the Tenth and Clement the Seventh, and afterwards, at their recommendation, preceptor to Alessandro and Ippolito de Medici; and though repeated attacks of gout, to which he was a martyr, had obliged him to quit Florence for Venice, (which he found agreed with him better,) he had evinced, and professed sufficient interest in young Bonaventuri, soon after the introduction of the latter to the Medici palace and the favour of his pupils Alessandro and Ippolito, to warrant the young man's building the first story of his aerial castle on his good offices.

Accordingly, after having for five years luxuriated in the ever-generous kindness of Vasari, and been alternately damped or scorched by the April changes of princely favour, Pietro became suddenly dejected and thoughtful—a mood so unwonted, and at variance with his natural character, that it could not fail to produce the effect he had desired, and excite the observation and inquiries of his friend and patrons. At first, he denied the fact of his spirits having suffered any diminution of their wonted buoy-

ancy—next hesitated—but, at length, seemed reluctantly to allow Vasari's earnest kindness to wring from him his secret, which he artfully based upon his unwillingness any longer to eat the bread of idleness, coupled with his great wish to study commerce at Venice, as a lucrative and honourable calling, and a natural desire, if possible, through the medium of his friends, to obtain his uncle's protection, instead of continuing, as he had hitherto done, to burden the kindness of strangers.

“Now, by Apelles!” cried Vasari, “thou hast relieved me by so much common sense—for my mind migave me, Pietro, but thou hadst got some gossamer phantasms in thy brain—such as are spun by moonlight and fine eyes in the green nooks of young men's fancies—in which case the matter would have been hopeless; but, as it is, having all the inclination, I shall not long lack the means to serve thee. There is our ancient friend Bolzanio, who has the honour of corresponding with his holiness, and I have no doubt of being able to get the Medici to consign thee to him; then comes my right excellent master, Titian, who is as good a friend as he is a limner; a word to him, and I am sure he will serve thee with the Barbarigi; and against such a host of worshipful allies thy flinty-hearted uncle will scarce hold out.”

Pietro expressed his gratitude to his generous patron, as gracefully as might be ; and a month after this conversation, he had taken leave of his father and friends, and left the beautiful country of his birth, to seek his fortune in the sea-girt city that then half swayed the world.

As Vasari had foretold, Baptista Bonaventuri was not proof against the merits of a nephew so powerfully recommended to him ; although to the old money-spinner's notions there was even an extravagance in Pietro's beauty which he did not quite approve, (and indeed, to say truth, the young man did possess quite enough to have supplied half-a-dozen economically-fashioned mortals,) while the equal lavishness of his dress he totally disapproved ; for Vasari, who though only a poor painter in estate, was a prince in heart, had put his protégé's wardrobe on a par with the gayest nobles of the time, and had not forgotten that the lining of the pockets should in some measure keep pace with their outward splendour ; so that young Bonaventuri had sufficient, at least for a year or two, to cope with those far richer in reality than himself, and in station greatly above him ; for the 6000 ducats Vasari had generously given him, intending it as a little capital to be increased by the thrift and *savoir* of his uncle, the young man preferred keeping, as a sort of floating passport into so-

ciety. Nor was he wrong in his calculations ; for as we have already seen, the young Venetian nobles were not indifferent to his “golden opinions ;” but on financial, as on most other points, the ideas of the uncle and nephew differed widely ; as the former looked upon all Pietro’s fine acquaintance only as so many sources from which money might be derived ; whereas the latter considered all Salviati’s wealth with no other degree of veneration than as *the* source from which he derived his acquaintance.

At the time our tale commences, young Bonaventuri had been about a year in Venice ; and after devoting two hours each morning to spoiling pens and drawing caricatures of his friends, upon all the paper within his reach, which was the method he adopted for studying commerce, he repaired to an academy, held by Bolzanio, in the Via delle Bella Donne, for teaching Latin to the young Venetian nobles of both sexes, not indeed for the purpose of learning Latin, for he justly considered that having done very well without it all the beginning of his life, he might continue to do so till the end of it ; but because there he had first formed, and had daily opportunities of increasing his circle of aristocratic acquaintance ; but above all, it was there he had first seen Bianca Cappello—a beautiful and delicate-looking girl of fifteen, and

clever as she was beautiful. Unlike her country-women, Bianca had great play of countenance, with the most perfect repose of feature—no grimace or *minauderie* ever for a moment destroyed the placid harmony of features, as perfect as had ever been cast in mortal mould; her hair, of a rich burnished chesnut, had not yet been tortured into the hideous and unnatural fashion of the time, but was simply fastened with a golden bodkin at the back of her head, and parted on a lofty forehead of dazzling whiteness; the low, straight, finely-pencilled eyebrows of which seemed like dark sentinels keeping watch above the heavy eyelids, that appeared weighed down with their own beauty. Her eyes were of a dark, soft hazel, floating as it were in liquid diamonds. She had no more colour than has a blush rose; but the same delicate yet affluent bloom was to be found on her cheek that is seen on the flower. Her rich red lips would have shamed a pomegranate blossom, while a whole preserve of Cupids seemed to be continually playing around them, either forcing their way through the thick ambush of her pouting under lip, or concealing themselves among the thousand dimples of her sunny smile.

Such was Bianca, and as such, it was not likely that Bonaventuri should have beheld her with indifference. Her beauty, however, he

might have resisted ; but when he remembered that she was the daughter of one of the highest nobles in Venice—that she was doubly connected with Grimani, the *Patriarch of Aquilea*, by her father's second marriage with his sister Elena, and that she was also allied to the Grittis and Morosinis, the wings of his love were impelled by ambition, and their flight knew no bounds, except perhaps those of a little more prudence than he was accustomed to use, on account of the five terrible powers, whose vengeance he risked by his presumption—namely, the republic, the vatican, the inquisition, his uncle—and though last, not least, Vittorio Cappello.

He knew that the worst dungeon of the inquisition would be the reward of his openly becoming the suitor of Bianca ; and nothing short of the rack the result of his failing in any more covert designs upon the descendant of so many doges. But love's diplomacy is ever subtle, as those unerring ambassadors of the heart, the eyes, never miscalculate in their policy ; and Pietro, with a tact that would have done credit to fifty winters, much less twenty summers, determined to provoke every overture from the lady, while the tremulous diffidence and respect of his manner, let what might follow, defied her to say, " he did it." He knew that it was at the

wish of her aunt, Vicenza Gritti, that she attended Bolzanio's *academia*; but he also knew that it was to escape the wearing persecutions of her step-mother's temper that she attended it so long and so punctually; and the fear of having the frequency of their meetings known (respectful and constrained as they were) to any member of her family it was which had made Pietro, on the preceding night, to her brother, date the commencement of their acquaintance from the fête at the French ambassador's, for which he had also another motive—that of the ambassador being the open and declared suitor of the beautiful and high-born Bianca; and though his excellency could not be said to have lost the charms of youth, inasmuch as he never had possessed them, yet was he considerably past that age when gentlemen engaged in matrimonial speculations are supposed to have the fairest chance of success. Still he was far from despairing; for, having insured the laughter of Bianca, he thought the small change of her smiles must be included; for, as a modern French writer has truly and wittily observed—“*L'interêt et la vanité font le meilleur ménage, dans le cœur d'un Parisien, l'un se charge de la recette, et l'autre de la dépense;*” and as the dower of Bianca was splendid, and her beauty undisputed, the *mé*

nage of the French ambassador's heart was perfect!

It may appear strange that a spirit so haughty as Vittorio Cappello's should, even through interested motives, have, with so beautiful a sister, volunteered to invite to the Palazzo Cappello so handsome, and yet so humble a person as Bonaventuri; but with regard to his beauty he was still ignorant, having only seen him with a mask. And for the rest, he had too great a faith in his sister's lofty spirit, and the almost imperial blood that circled in her veins, to imagine that she could look with aught but disdain on anything less noble than herself.

As for Bonaventuri, he was so elated that he could hardly believe in his own identity. To think that, after a whole year of retreating, and almost despairing sighs, and nearly a forest of anonymous bouquets, and an opera of unanswered serenades, he should have the doors of the Palazzo Cappello thrown open to him by its most dreaded Cerberus, Vittorio himself! and best of all, that he should *feel certain* that the flowers and the challenge that had been flung to him at the carnival, had come, directly or indirectly, from Bianca.

It may be easily imagined that, from his first acquaintance with the beautiful Venetian, he had relinquished all intention of associating himself

either with the philosophical monk Paul Nicoletti, or the astrologer Magini, having resolved to distinguish himself in a manner much more suited to his talents and consonant with his inclinations.

CHAPTER III.

“ Seal up your lips, and give no words but—mum !
This business asketh silent secrecy.”

SHAKSPEARE.

“ The ambassadors, who were the best people in the world, did their best to set before me, how disagreeable it would be to me to see myself hanged in the flower of my age.”—COUNT ANTONY HAMILTON’S *Four Facardins*.

IT was nearer noon than nine the morning after the night recorded in the first chapter, that Pietro Bonaventuri entered the counting-house of Salviati, where sat his uncle Baptista on a high stool before a desk—if possible, in a less amiable mood than usual. Being the hour of dinner, the office was deserted save by only him.

Baptista was a little spare old man, with a sharp, thin, parchment-looking face, wherein time had made divers indentures ; his eyes were small, black, and still sparkling ; his hair,

though long, was perfectly white, thin and silvery, but his beard, which he wore after the Armenian fashion, was longer and thicker ; his lips, by nature thin, appeared still thinner from a habit he had of biting them inwards, as though afraid too much of the breath of life might escape if he allowed nature to take its course ; his nose was one of those thin, downward promontories, that never yet deceived in giving the world assurance of a "miser." On his head was a small black Armenian cap, and his dress was invariably black, tufted with shabby velvet tassels, and not made after the spruce fashion of the day, but of the long-time immemorial cut of a Venetian senator's. He always accompanied his own thoughts by a low, wheezy sort of querulous pur, as if to hold in readiness a dissenting note to any speech that might be addressed to him.

He raised his eyes with no pleased or pleasing expression as Pietro entered the counting-house—it must be confessed, even more gaily apparelled than usual, and carelessly arranging a very dainty white plume within the custody of a gold loop and button, that graced the side of his splendid velvet cap.

"Um—um—um ! so there thou art at last, thou worst block that poor sculptor ever turned out of his studio. Mayhap thou mayst tell me

how fortunes are made by sleeping, for it must be an easy and a pleasant way withal."

"Ay, marry, uncle, is it; for then is the only time *I* ever dream of making one."

"Nephew, I believe it, or else thou wouldst not ruffle it with all the crack-brained ne'er-dowells of this most iniquitous city, carrying half the trade of Genoa on thy worthless back, and a whole wilderness of outlandish birds' wings on thy head,—but then, no doubt, the less that's *in it* the more thou thinkest should be *on it*. Go to!—were it not for thy fine patrons, who do watch over thee like the gilt angel that plays the weathercock on the summit of St. Mark's, I'd cancel thee at once."

"Nay, uncle, *that* would be ungenerous; for by your own shewing it would be cancelling an obligation, since you are *obliged* to keep me."

"I tell thee that I *would*, though, Master Malapert," said the old man, knocking his clenched hand vehemently against the desk—"I tell thee I would, for what hast thou learnt during the whole year thou hast been in Venice, except it be doge-hunting, title-hunting, and idleness?"

"Uncle, uncle, you forget Latin, and my studies at Bolzanio's!" rejoined Pietro, with a smile he could not repress, at the consciousness of his perfect innocence of that language.

“ Latin ! a fine way of getting money truly ! Now, by Santa Maria Zobenigo, this is too bad ! Canst tell me how many two and two make in Latin ? ”

“ Four—the same as in Italian, I suppose,” said Pietro, with a very unsophisticated air of candour. “ But why have such a pique against either Latin or learning, uncle, since neither of them, I take it, are in any way *indebted to you.* ”

“ There can be no good in them,” said the old man, heedless of the sarcasm, “ when they bring thee acquainted with such a set of bacchanals and spendthrifts.”

“ Nay, if you would quarrel with mine acquaintance, methinks,” laughed the nephew, “ ’twere *more germane* to the matter to begin with the imperial ambassador, who, through me, was brought to negotiate the Negropont and Vienna loan with you.”

Pietro could not have aimed a more skilful jibe, as he knew that this loan was the most golden harvest Baptista had reaped for many a day ; and, with his usual diplomacy, he had managed to saddle the ambassador with an eternal obligation, (which had already begun to be paid in instalments, by opening the doors of the best palazzos in Venice to him,) while, whenever

he was hard run, it enabled him effectually to silence his uncle's bickerings and reproaches.

"Ah! well—yes; I own thou hast me there; and that, in truth, is a proper-fashioned, creditable acquaintance enough, being the first who ever gave thee any notion of business; but for the rest!"—groaned Baptista, turning up his eyes and raising his clasped hands—"there is nothing in them, therefore, *Santo Spirito*, nothing to be got out of them."

"Now are you hugely ungrateful, uncle, for they do affect you marvellously, and are, one and all, as punctual in their civilities towards you as though you were an infant doge, some three days made."

"I do confess," said the old man, with a sort of rattling, unearthly sound in his throat, which was always the result of his attempts at a laugh—"I do confess that they are, one and all, equally punctual in their borrowings, and of an admirable exactness in their non-payments. Thou art nobility-stricken; but I tell thee, boy, that rank blood is like rank grass—all its merit is derived from the dead, for in both cases they flourish upon graves."

"And yet great people may be of use sometimes," replied Pietro, "for where will Trade, that ever busy daughter of old Commerce, ply

her many handed calling with such zeal and profit as on the new bridge our good senator Pasquale Cicogna is now planning. May he live to be Doge, say I !”

“By the gabardine of Moses, but it is a good bridge, that said Rialto, and Pasquale would make a good Doge, and a worshipful withal, and long may he reign when he does reign !”

Here their conversation was interrupted by the voice of Salviati calling Pietro, and in another moment the worthy merchant stood before them.

“Take this immediately,” said he, placing a large parchment packet sealed with three large pendant seals, and carefully tied with silver cord, in Pietro’s hand, “to the Palazzo Grimani, and deliver it *yourself* to the Patriarch. See on no account that it passeth through any hands but from thine to his.”

“Any answer, signor ?” inquired Pietro.

“That dependeth on his lordship’s pleasure, which we wait to know. If there is, bring it hence on the instant ; if not, make thine own of the rest of the day, as it is Carnival time.”

Pietro bowed his thanks and disappeared. The Piazza was nearly empty, save here and there a lazy opium-eating Turk, smoking, for change of idleness, a long amber-mouthed hookah, or a vender of baked *zuccas*, who pre-

ferred taking his *siesta al fresco* to his own miserable home.

Young Bonaventuri looked up at the windows of the Palazzo Cappello as he passed, yet nought saw he but closely shut blinds; but as it was impossible to know what ears or eyes might be behind them, he hazarded a few sighs and two or three very irresistible glances on speculation, and then hurried on to the wharf, where, stepping into Salviati's gondola, he gave orders to be conveyed to the Palazzo Grimani.

Arrived there, he found the magnificent Gondola of the Patriarch of Aquilea waiting at the door, and the small black flag that floated at the helm, intimating that he was about to attend the Council of Ten, formed a gloomy contrast to the violet velvet lining and cushions of the gondola, gorgeously embroidered in gold, with the winged lions of St. Mark's. The gondoliers were also splendidly habited in violet velvet and gold; on their left arms, they wore, not embroidered but in a *bas relief* of solid gold, the delicate and cunning workmanship of which was worthy of Benvenuto Cellini, the arms of the Grimani, surmounted by a trident. Each oar was not simply gilt, like those of the *Bucentoro*, but was capped with an arabesque of burnished gold, inlaid with coral, and those small, pearl-like, and many-coloured

shells which to this day are found in such profusion at Venice. These oars, as they lightly dashed off the feathered spray of the silver waves, on which a thousand sunbeams sparkled, seemed but ill adapted heralds of the dark dooms they daily bore in conveying the *Patriarch of Aquilea* to the Senate.

Besides the gondola of the Grimani were innumerable others belonging to different nobles and ambassadors, among which Bonaventuri noticed that of his rival, the French ambassador, the Marquis de Millepropos, which might be known by its peach-blossom lining, silver fleurs-de lis, portrait of Charles the Ninth of France, innumerable mirrors, and small table, containing several pairs of gold fringed gloves, two or three embroidered kerchiefs, *a few flacons of sweet-scented waters*, and a double-hilted sword, with an inscription announcing that it was the gift of the Chevalier de Bayard to his excellency's father: and for appearance' sake,—for appearances must be kept up by all who don't want to be kept down—was a crimson velvet despatch-box, studded round with gold nails, and displaying a very ponderous and formidable looking padlock of the same metal, stamped with the royal arms of France.

The whole of this gorgeous flotilla now made way for the very splendid, though less regal-

looking gondola of Salviati, from which young Bonaventuri alighted amid a hall full of serving men, and was conducted up stairs by two pages to a large gallery, where he found a goodly crowd of foreign ambassadors, senators, and merchants, who were all waiting the leisure of the Patriarca to give them audience, and who seemed too busy with their own thoughts or conversation to heed the entrance of an additional person, so that Pietro passed unnoticed as he took his stand near a pillar of Egyptian marble, where two ecclesiastics were, with many significant shrugs of horror and fear, discussing the death of Cardinal Caraffa, who had just been hanged by order of Pius the Fourth ; but at the same time never forgetting to bow reverentially whenever they mentioned his Holiness's name.

Whether it was the splendour that surrounded him which dazzled, or the aristocratic atmosphere he was breathing that awed him, it might be a difficult matter to decide ; but certain it was, that for a moment—though only for a moment—Bonaventuri relinquished the sort of "*Aude aliquid*" determination he had acted upon for the last year, as he felt the supercilious. "What on earth can bring *you* here?" sort of glances cast on him by some of the magnates, as he moved down the gallery, and turned with a sigh to a magnificent statue of Marcus Agrippa.

When Pietro had done contemplating the statue, he lowered his eyes, and beheld, leaning against the pedestal, a middle sized man, numbering, it might be, some forty years ; his face was exceedingly pale, but it was more the palor of thought than of care or malady ; his forehead was lofty in the extreme, his hair dark, thick, and glossy, and worn according to the fashion of the time, in one full curl over each ear ; his eyebrows were low and delicately pencilled ; his nose slightly aquiline, but very finely chiselled, as was his short upper lip, though somewhat concealed by his dark moustache ; his beard was forked, after the English fashion ; his eyes were large, dark, and, though very soft, wondrously penetrating, and as a magnet attracts steel, they seemed as though they could attract the secrets of all men's hearts to reveal themselves to their scrutiny ; his dress was of black velvet, with no relief save that of his trunk hose being slashed with purple silk, of which material his cloak was also lined, and broidered round the border on the outer side with divers glittering black bugles ; his ruff was of a snowy whiteness, but even his gloves and sword were black, the gauntlets of the former being of an exceeding shining black leather ; no ornament of any sort did he wear, except a good-sized diamond in

the rosette of each shoe, and a diamond loop and button fastening the black plume in his cap.

As Pietro desisted from his scrutiny of the statue of Marcus Agrippa, he beheld the eyes of this individual gazing intently on him. At first he thought it might be some acquaintance whom he had forgotten, but, upon a further examination of the features before him, Bonaventuri could nowhere recollect to have seen them, though there was that sort of attractive harmony in the expression of the stranger's face which seemed to usurp, in the good graces of the young Florentine, the place of an old acquaintance, and involuntarily he advanced a step or two towards him; the other, also, came forward, and looking hurriedly around, whispered in Bonaventuri's ear—

“*Pietro Bonaventuri!* thou gropest in the dark; but, if thou hast courage, be in the Via del Cocomero, *on the water side*, one hour after midnight, this day week, and I will give thee light to find that thou seekest: but breathe to mortal ears that thou *comest, or a syllable of what I now say*, and the ever ready death-boat, that lies moored under the Bridge of Sighs, shall be thy reward.”

Bonaventuri started even more at the stranger's accurate knowledge of his name, than at the mys-

terious mandate he had issued with so fiat-like an air, and was about to ask for whom he should inquire, and to what house he should go in the Via del Cocomero, when the man of mystery, as though he divined his thoughts, said, in the same low and oracular tone—

“304, the corner house!—there wait—on foot—*alone!*” and before Bonaventuri could reply, he added, ‘*tace*—silence!’ and, tightly grasping his hand to enforce the order, moved on, pressing, as he did so, a roll of paper he had held in his hand to his lips—and in another instant he had either left the gallery or effectually concealed himself in the crowd.

Pietro was so thoroughly astounded that he stared vacantly about him; nor was he recalled to a sense of his present locality till his foot was heavily pressed by that of some other person.

Upon turning to ascertain to whom the belligerent foot belonged, he received the “*mille pardons*” of the French ambassador, who, wholly occupied with the contemplation of his own person in different attitudes, as reflected by a mirror, had, while coquetting with his beard and humming a caranto, stepped back the better to admire what he considered the only chef d’œuvre in the room—namely, what the mirror before him presented—and in so doing he had mistaken Bonaventuri’s foot for the floor. There

played round his excellency's features that glow of satisfaction which ill-natured persons might have called the *ignis fatuus* of vanity, for it seemed to say as plainly as look could speak—*que je suis heureux moi ! d'être moi, et avec moi !*—for it is but natural that our highest enjoyment should be derived from the constant presence of the individual for whom we entertain the sincerest affection and profoundest admiration.

Having once broken the ice by apologizing to Bonaventuri, and torn his thoughts away from the amiable object that for ever occupied them, he became affably attentive to some of the persons around him—

“ Ah, Signor Paolo Paruta,”* said he, addressing a young man dressed in a doublet of murray-coloured velvet, “ I am charmed to see you—how goes the world with you? We must take care—we must take care, Don Gomez,” added he, laughingly, laying his hand on the shoulder of the Spanish ambassador, “ or Signor Paruta will put us all in his book.”

“ Hardly,” rejoined Paruta, drily, “ for history, in my opinion, should be as free from absurdities as possible.”

“ Sans doute—sans doute,” replied Monsieur

* Paolo Paruta was a Venetian historian of the sixteenth century.

le Marquis, guiltless of understanding Paruta's gibe, "and it is, as you justly observe, very absurd to print everybody that comes in one's way, after the fashion of some authors. Ah! a marvellous proper youth that, upon my word," continued he, looking at an interesting boy of about sixteen, who stood beside Paruta; his figure had all the buoyancy and elasticity of youth, but in his countenance—particularly his deep and starry eyes—was an expression of melancholy that only belonged to after years.

Alas, how often a patriarchal fate attends genius—making the spirit martyr and prophet all in one!

"A marvellous proper youth, upon my word," repeated the French ambassador; "no doubt your brother, Signor Paolo?"

"No," replied Paruta, "I wish he were; but he is only a young friend of mine, from whom I one day hope great things—his name is Tasso—Torquato Tasso."

"*Connois pas*—a Venetian family?" inquired his excellency.

"Yes," was the brief reply.

"Ah, well, Signor Torquato, I wish you all imaginable good, on my life!" cried the Marquis. "Only beware of the women, and you'll do well; I speak from a *triste experience*, for they have been my bane ever since I was your

age—indeed, I may say, before it, for I had a nurse, Mademoiselle Clemence, who used to whip me soundly.”

“ Oh, the ingratitude of some men !” said Don Gomez de Sylva, with an infinite deal of sly humour lurking in the corner of his eye. “ To hear the Marquis de Millepropos denounce the sex—he that is proverbially their *enfant gâté* !”

“ Ah, mon cher,” said the Marquis, with a contrite sigh, as he caressed his beard—“ je vous fiere que les succès même donnent des regrets !”

“ My dear Marquis,” said Don Gomez, with great gravity, “ you are too sensitive ; for I am sure, could you but keep your imagination quiet, your conscience would never have cause to reproach you. I wont go as far,” added he, with an irresistibly comic air of deep sympathy—“ I wont go as far as to include the proceedings of Mademoiselle Clemence, for those of course must have left a sting behind ; but as you are subject to the virtuous weakness of remorse, why continue to make love to every woman you meet ?”

“ You wrong me, I assure you,” said his excellency, in a most exculpatory tone.—“ I do *not* make love to them—it is they—but, no matter, *enfin*—it is not my fault if women have

eyes. But I assure you I never allow a woman to tamper with her own affections, if I can help it; for I tell them at once, when they have no chance."

"But, the Cappello?" laughed Don Gomez.

"Oh, mon cher, as for Bianca, I am in earnest in that quarter, I assure you, for she has such a portion!—Magnifique!" whispered his excellency.

What further passed between the two, Bonaventuri was prevented from hearing, by the sudden opening of a door behind them, at which a grave-looking man, the secretary of the Patriarch, appeared; and walking quietly up to Pietro, intimated to him that his master would receive him in his closet.

This seemed to be considered an amazing honour; for the patrician crowd instantly gave way most deferentially to the young merchant, who on his part lost no time in assuming a look of sufficient importance for his sudden elevation, merely bowing slightly as he passed his friend, the imperial ambassador, with a sort of diplomatic telegraphic look, which plainly said to the rest of the crowd, "*Nous y sommes*," but which mystified the poor ambassador more thoroughly than their supposed ignorance did his compeers. However, there is no earthly use

in being an ambassador, if it does not enable a man to be perfectly *au fait* to things that he has never either seen or heard of. At all events, profound ignorance, with suitable presumption, seems to be of marvellous advantage to some of their secretaries.

When the door closed upon Bonaventuri, he traversed a large room till he reached a smaller one, where, in a high-backed carved chair, gorgeously gilt, sat the Patriarch of Aquilea, before a large table, covered with ponderous books, papers, and writing materials. On it was also a basket-hilted sword, and a pair of gauntlets, a gold embossed salver, and two antique Hebe-shaped jugs of the same metal, a large high gold chalice-shaped cup, and a gold wire basket of dried fruits.

Grimani was an old man, with long flowing white hair ; blue eyes, which had lost somewhat of their lustre, but none of the penetration which thirty years of inquisitorial exercise had given them ; his head rather drooped towards his right shoulder, and slightly shook under the years it bore. No sooner had the secretary opened the door for Bonaventuri than he withdrew, and the latter found himself, not without some slight trepidation, before the Patriarch ; for in those days men never knew at what mo-

ment they were destined to receive the punishment of the crimes they might be *accused* of committing.

“ Know you aught of your mission, young man ?” inquired Grimani, in a clear, but by no means formidable voice.

“ Nothing, *monsignore*,” bowed Pietro, presenting his packet ; “ but that my master, Carlo Salviati, bade me deliver this into your worthiness’s own hand.”

“ ’Tis well, ’tis well,” repeated the Patriarch, taking it out of Bonaventuri’s hand, and undoing the cord, while the latter fell back to a respectful distance ; but not so far but that he could perceive the contents of the packet to consist of a curiously-wrought key, in detached pieces, which Grimani put together, after a written description and a plan that was drawn upon the parchment.

“ Very good, very good !” said he, after he had thoroughly examined it, replacing it in the parchment, which he immediately locked in an iron box, that was placed in a chair beside him, during which process Bonaventuri took the opportunity of turning his face to the window, in order to look as though he had seen nothing of the contents of the packet, though all the information he had gained by what he had seen only enabled him to conjecture that the key was

one of some formidably secret construction, for inquisitorial purposes.

After having secured two or three papers in his girdle, the Patriarch rang a little silver hand-bell, whereupon two pages appeared, one bearing a gold ewer and basin, and the other a napkin and soap, with which Grimani washed his hands ; after which he summoned his secretary, and giving into his charge several papers, about which he gave suitable directions, the old man rose, and receiving a large silver crozier, with a ruby top, from one of the pages, he turned to Bonaventuri, saying, while the other page placed his mitre on his head—

“No doubt, honest Master Salviati’s young friend here will lend me his arm as far as the gallery, through which I must in courtesy pass before I go to the senate, though in truth I am already somewhat of the latest.”

Bonaventuri did not desire better, and, bowing his acquiescence very gracefully, presented his arm to the great man. Nor was he a little elevated at perceiving how much this trifling and accidental circumstance seemed to raise him in public estimation. To judge from the mingled looks of deference and curiosity that were cast upon him from the gallery, the doors of which were thrown open by the two pages who preceded them, long before the infirm steps

of the Patriarch bore him across the large ante-room they had to traverse.

Another incident which considerably enhanced Bonaventuri's apparent importance, was the recumbent position of Grimani's head, which obliged the young Florentine to bend his own so closely to the Patriarch's ear, in reply to the very commonplace questions the old man addressed to him, that it gave a truly confidential and important air to their conference ; and as a *coup de grace*, when they were within twenty yards of the gallery, Grimani, being encumbered by the length of his robes, stopped to adjust them ; and seeing the effect the apparent secrecy of their conversation had already produced on "the multitude," Pietro took that opportunity of whispering in the old man's ear—

"I think your worthiness would find it more commodious to carry this weight of ermine on your left arm."

"You are right—you are right," repeated Grimani, as he nodded his approbation of Bonaventuri's suggestion.

The words, and even the nods of great men are swift travellers, so those of the Patriarch Aquilea soon reached the gallery, and formed a ladder by which Bonaventuri rose to a high place in the diplomatic opinions of *Messieurs les Ambassadeurs*.

“Signors, I pray you a thousand pardons,” said Grimani, on entering the gallery, “for the time you have tarried here, and I crave a thousand more for being obliged to quit you on the instant; but the council waits, and I am already late.”

Whereupon an obsequious murmur arose, begging his worthiness would not waste another moment of his precious time; and the crowd fell back on either side to let him pass, which he did, courteously bowing his thanks to the right and to the left, as he moved onward, repeating his apologies as he went.

As the Patriarch passed on, the crowd followed him, even to the foot of the stairs, till he reached his gondola; when, turning to Bonaventuri, he said in a low voice, “I will communicate with Salviati concerning the packet to-morrow,” whereupon Pietro bowed, as he assisted the old man into the gondola, and the crowd remained cap in hand till it rowed out of sight, when a little knot of ambassadors gathered round the Florentine, and after exerting in vain all their wits to elicit from him at least the outline of his conference with the Patriarch, they changed their tactics by energetically impressing upon him the necessity of the most profound secrecy concerning any communications he might have with his worthiness, adding what a terrible thing

it would be, if by any accident or indiscretion so fine a young man should incur the displeasure of the Holy Inquisition!"

While he inwardly smiled at the fox-and-grapes tone of their superfluous advice, Bonaventuri thanked them, and promised to profit by it; after which, taking leave of his illustrious Mentors, and having the rest of the day to himself, he determined to repair to his favourite haunt, the school of Valeriano Bolzanio.

CHAPTER IV.

"The misery of us that are born great :
We are forced to woo, because none dare woo us."
WEBSTER.

"Tush ! I may as well say the fool's the fool."
SHAKSPEARE.

IN a lofty room of the Palazzo Cappello, hung with the master-pieces of Titian, Paul Veronese, and Giovanni and Leonardo da Brescia, — a large Venetian window opening into a spacious marble balcony, that well mimicked a garden from its profusion of rare and exquisite flowers, which seemed lulled into additional sweetness by the ever-whispering murmur of the waves that flowed beneath them, while from the chamber within, to which they lent their perfume, the sun was veiled but not excluded,—there sat a group of four : one was an old man—that is, about sixty in years, but with that beaming out from within which, defying

age, claimed all the sympathies of youth ; for there was a fire still in the eye, and a sunshine about the mouth, that told nothing of the winter of life. Were it perceptible any where, it might be in his silver locks ; but even here, time had ill succeeded, for they played as wantonly with every passing breeze as though they had still been in their golden prime.

He sat on a high-backed gold arras chair, before an easel, with a palette in his hand, and a very arch smile on his lip ; opposite to him sat, in an equally high-backed chair, an ancient lady, the North Pole of whose demeanour was perfectly impenetrable. Her face was pale and narrow, her nose long and aquiline, her lips thin and pinched, her eyes black, small, and piercing—not unlike those of Elizabeth of England. On her head she wore a full frizzed, yet small red peruke, elaborately studded with very costly pearls, rubies, and diamonds. Her dress was of black velvet, curiously embroidered with pearls and gold ; her ruff was as stiff as her carriage, and she held her head so high, that her eyes must have had some difficulty in seeing where to place the stitches in the rich white Padusay silk she was embroidering for a *Cotta* for her confessor. Rarely any sound passed her lips, except to say an *Ave Maria* on her splendid rosary, whenever she caught the

chimes of some neighbouring church bell, or to find fault with everything that her step-daughter Bianca, and her foster sister Arianna Ferrai, did or did not do, for they were the other two that formed the group of four, and the ancient lady was the Signora Elena Cappello.

On a low ottoman sat, or rather half reclined, the beautiful Bianca, and at her feet was placed the no less beautiful, but very different Arianna. The latter was a fair, slight, blooming, blue-eyed, golden-haired girl, with *Italian features* and a northern complexion, producing that perfection of beauty that is sometimes to be seen in Italy.

Bianca was restlessly dividing her idleness between entangling the bright locks of Arianna, as her pretty head rested on her lap—pulling the ears of two little *favoritas*, or Blenheims, that occupied a part of the ottoman—and ever and anon pouring wine out of a golden vase into a high golden cup that stood on a little table beside her, and pressing the before mentioned old man, by the affectionate appellation of *Carino*, to drink, which he as often declined—putting off the fair Circe by pointing to sundry humorous sketches he had etched of the Signora Elena at the corner of his canvas, which that illustrious lady, half suspecting, (a fact of which she gave notice by the increased asperity of her

looks,) Bianca started up, and placing her hand on the tell-tale caricature, affected to examine the portrait, which was one of herself and her two dogs.

“ Now really, Signor Titian,” said she, smiling, “ with all due deference to your skill, you have flattered me marvellously, and not done justice to either ‘ Fato’* or ‘ Tafano.’ ”†

“ By the beard of John Vermeyen‡, whose portrait hangs yonder,” said the artist, “ both are impossible. I could not flatter you, signorina, for it is not in paint and canvas to excel one of the cunningest chef d’œuvres of Nature’s handy work ; and as for those little animals, by Canis ! they are the greatest beauties that ever stepped in dog-skin ; and what pencil could give their diamond eyes, velvet ears, and satin coats, or half the darlingry of their little ways ? But what I *can* do I *will* do, and this portrait shall be a *Titianus fecit, fecit.*§ Ha ! ha ! ha ! ”

* Fairy.

† Gadfly.

‡ A Dutch painter, whose beard touched the ground as he stood. He died in 1559.

§ It is the ingenious remark of a French critic, that the Greek sculptors never presumed to make use of the perfect tense, when the artist set his name to the statue. It was always “ *εποίησε,* ” not “ *πεποίηχεν :* ” he never ventured to affirm that *his* work was perfect. On the other hand, Titian, to reprimand the insolence of ignorant, presuming critics, wrote beneath all that he considered his best pictures, *Titianus fecit, fecit.*

Bianca, "for methinks I should at least know his name before I consent to stroll down to posterity with him."

"I scarcely think you do," replied Titian, "though you may have seen him. He is one Bonaventuri, who hath been in Venice some twelve months, to learn commerce under Salviati. He is a youth of rare beauty! seldom have I seen features that I do affect so much."

The crimson blood mantled in the fair cheek of Bianca, as she exchanged a hasty glance with Arianna; and trying to assume a tone of indifference, while a beautiful magnolia paid the penalty of her agitation, by having its leaves severed one by one, and scattered in every direction, she added—

"Really! So much beauty must be worth knowing."

"Santa Maria! it is well your father hears you not," said the Signora Elena, turning up her eyes, and then plying her needle with double celerity, "or he might deem that such forwardness in one of your age and sex well deserved the fate of Pelops."

"*Illustrissima Signora*," smiled Titian, "already the Signorina hath incurred the fate of Pelops, inasmuch as she doth possess an ivory shoulder."

“Fie—fie ! Signor Titian. I marvel you have not more discretion than to turn a silly girl’s brain by feeding her with such manchets of flattery.”

“I know not for her brain, but I must turn her head. A little more this way, and it please you, Signora Bianca. There—so—that will do very well.”

“What seek you, Arianna?” said Bianca to the young girl, who was busy searching among the fresh strewed rushes on the floor for something she had lost.

“A small gold bodkin I have dropped,” replied Arianna.

“Alas, sister mine ! it is a judgment on you,” said Bianca, looking archly at her; “it is but fair you should have losses as well as others; and you have just as much chance of finding your bodkin as poor Ernesto Vasi has of finding his heart when he looks in your eyes for it; for, strange to say, poor youth, the more he looks, the more he loses it.

“Signora,” blushed Arianna, “you know you are welcome to talk any nonsense that amuses you.”

“Provided the tenour of it be but decent !” bridled the Signora Elena. “Mercy on me ! what will this world come to ? This man’s beauty ! and the other’s eyes ! Why, at your

age, Signora Bianca, I did not know whether a man had eyes !”,

“ Then all I can say is, *matrigna mia*, that you could have had none yourself,” said Bianca, with a look of such saucy humour, that Titian had much ado to prevent himself laughing outright, while the scandalized Signora Elena vented her horror in another upturning of her eyes, and an exclamation of “ *Virgo santissima !*”

“ Arianna,” cried Bianca, “ bring me my veil and fan, for it is time we should be at Bolzanio’s; and so, mio caro,” added she, turning to Titian, “ I will release you till this hour the day after to-morrow.”

“ Well, the day after to-morrow,” said the artist, gathering up his brushes, and turning his picture to the wall; after which, kissing the hands of Bianca and Arianna, and bowing profoundly to the Signora Elena, he withdrew.

“ Never,” said Bianca, as she sank into the down cushions of her gondola, and reclined her beautiful head on Arianna’s shoulder—“ never do I feel so inclined to explore what is at the bottom of the sea as when I have been undergoing a course of step-mother for an hour or two. Ah me, Arianna ! Already I begin to feel what a hard unsatisfying struggle life is; for life is two-fold; we have all an outward and

visible being, of events and circumstances; and an inward and invisible one, of feelings and thoughts; each is eternally grappling with each, trying to sway the other, and Time reaps his spoil whichever way the contest ends."

"You are young for such feelings, lady," replied Arianna, affectionately; "and with beauty, rank, and wealth, such as yours, many might wonder what you could lack to make you happy."

"What were rank, wealth, or beauty in a desert, where there were none to traffic with the former, or to see the latter? and all my advantages are much the same to me. I feel a want that I cannot describe—not but what I am ambitious—ay, beyond discretion; but ambition does not satisfy me. I glory too in being a daughter of the freest state in Italy—but, oh, Arianna! nature never intended the heart for a republic—it requires an absolute monarch."

"There is not one among the flower of the Venetian nobles that would not gladly rule over such an empire," said Arianna.

"Out upon the Venetian nobles—they affect me not," retorted Bianca, pettishly. "Nature sometimes makes sad mistakes, and like an unskilful leech, labels her compounds wrongly, writing on some 'patrician' for 'plebeian,' and *vice versa*."

“Very true,” said Arianna, with a sigh, for she knew full well the drift of this remark, having long perceived Bianca’s growing affection for Bonaventuri: and, at the same time, equally disliking to contradict her, and yet dreading to encourage her in an attachment that might have such fearful consequences, which were doubly recalled to her mind at that moment by the magnificent gondola of the Patriarch of Aquilea, which shot past them, as it neared the little creek of the wharf at the Piazzetta of the Dogal Palace.

“Heigh-ho!” said Bianca. “I have done nothing for Bolzanio—not a line; but he is a dear old man, even when his gout, or what is infinitely more afflicting, the pompous stupidity of that leaden fool, Gonzo Damerino, plagues him most.”

“Methinks,” smiled Arianna, “you are severe, lady, on the poor youth’s deficiencies.”

“Nay, not so; on God’s work none have a right to comment; but when man or woman takes out a royal privilege for making themselves fools, why then, marry, have all a right to make merry at their expense, when they give you so public an invitation so to do. Now, that it hath pleased God to knead Gonzo with stupidity—in that hath he no fault: but that it hath pleased himself to embroider that stupidity with

would-be philosophy, and incomprehensible strainings after the sublime, in that is he most ridiculous, and well merits the rich harvest of laughter he reaps. He would not for his life miss the shadow of a fête, a turn in a Coranto, nor a step in a La Volta ; yet shall he entertain his partner the whole time with the frivolity of the age ! discourse her of Zeno, Anaxagoras, Plato, and Aristotle, and such like delicacies from the ancients ; for he knows them all by *name*, as he does most of the great men of his own day, who, not to fatigue the philosophers *too much*, constantly relieve guard, and are ever in his mouth ! Then will he assume a look, and inform you, with the air of a Socrates, and a fearful pause between every syllable, to give the wisdom more effect, that summer is apt to be hotter than winter !—that drinking iced water when warm is sometimes attended with danger !—that men of eighty are wont to be less active than those of thirty ; which pearls of perspicuity he will string, with a profound sigh, on the total absence of mind and intellectual sustenance in Venice—the frivolity of the Venetians—their dissipation—the affectation of their dress ! When, lo ! he will straight be thrown into an agony at seeing a mote descend upon his sleeve, or on feeling a quarter of a thread of his ruff fall into a rumple. Then,

some false, malicious mirror having persuaded him that he is handsome, it is perfectly astonishing the degree of admiration he thinks it necessary to bestow upon himself, and to try and extort from others. But the general finale of all is—‘Ah—hum—ah!—have you heard Paolo Nicoletti’s last splendid lecture on the peripatetic doctrine, signora?’

‘No; but pray favour me with some account of it, and then I may have the benefit of your opinion at the same time.’

‘Why—a—I—a—am sorry to say I—a—had business of importance, which prevented my hearing it.’

‘True; I remember meeting you on that day at Hiredalgo’s Spanish puppet-show—ha! ha! ha!’

“And then the would-be Solomon walks off, to lament my frivolity and *want of mind* to his next victim.”

Bianca had talked a most exquisite blush into her delicate cheek, and never had she looked more beautiful than when she stepped out of the gondola at Bolzanio’s door.

Being, as we have before stated, much afflicted with the gout, the old man’s apartments were on the ground floor, and the room in which he held his school opened out of the spacious hall: it was a long and lofty room, supported

by green marble pillars ; along the walls were ranged, in the shape of modern garden-seats, highly polished and carved oak benches ; before each was a table of the same, with books and writing-materials upon it, and appended to each massive bronze inkstand was a silver label, attached by a chain of the same, on which was inscribed the name of the pupil to whom that particular table belonged.

Along this room, or rather gallery, were busts and statues of the whole of Bolzanio's patrons, the Medici, and some good bronzes of Plato, Zeno, Aristotle, Aristides, and Epictetus, with one fine statue of Seneca.

The school of Bolzanio, from consisting, not of children, but of modish young nobles, and beautiful ladies spendidly attired, was in those days one of the most fashionable lounges in all Venice ; and it was a common piece of pedantry to affect the studious, by declining visitors at home, and adjourning them to Bolzanio's, where, being all adults, ignorance and stupidity were both leniently dealt with, and even reproof wore the guise of compliment—add to which, the freshest news from Rome was always to be had there, from Bolzanio's high favour at the Vatican.

The old man sat in a large chair, elevated on a sort of dais, at the upper end of the room near

the window. He wore a loose green velvet dressing-gown, bordered with sable, and loose Turkish sleeves, lined with the same. On his head was a round violet velvet cap, embroidered with gold ; his hair was still thick, though perfectly white, and fell in curls between his shoulders ; his complexion retained much of the freshness of youth, and the benevolence of his countenance was never for a moment disguised, even by the extreme pain he seemed to suffer from his right foot, which rested on a high crimson velvet cushion.

From the murmur of many voices, the floating of perfumed handkerchiefs, and the gorgeous variety of magnificent dresses, the gallery had more the air of an assembly than of an *academia*, the only thing childish in its appearance being the grotesque decorations of the busts and statues ; for while Zeno frowned from under a gay cap and feather, Cosimo de Medici was modestly concealed under a lady's veil, and the scroll Aristides held in his hand was capped with a gold fringed glove ; but some Malthusian youth had thrown his cloak over the Gracchi and their mother, for so had Bolzanio's pupils disposed of their superfluous gear.

When Bianca and Arianna arrived, Bolzanio was telling Gonzo Damerino, as was his wont, to explain to a younger pupil what the ancients

meant by prefixing the title of *Sylvæ* to their miscellaneous literature ; for he liked to test the extent of one scholar's information by getting him to impart it to another.

“ Well, Signor Gonzo, tell Don Carlos de Sylva here why the Romans called their miscellanies *Sylvæ*. Was it out of compliment to him—eh? ha, ha, ha!”

“ No! oh, no!” replied Gonzo, solemnly, eschewing the jest, “ they—a—merely borrowed—that is, copied it from the Greek word *Hylus*.”

“ *Hyle*!” corrected Bolzanio.

“ Yes, yes—of course, I meant *Hyle*,” resumed Gonzo, “ which the Greeks modestly assumed to intimate that they had only collected a store of *timber*, or materials, which others might use to erect a regular structure.”

“ Quite right,” said Bolzanio; “ but the *Sylvæ* of Statius are said, by the critics, to be more valuable than his finished works. That will do; I see you understand the meaning of the *Sylvæ* perfectly.”

“ What were the use of his being a *stick* if he did not!” whispered Bianca to Arianna.

“ Ah, Signora Bianca!” said the old man, extending both his hands to her—“ I am delighted to see you. What have you got for me? Something good, no doubt, for you are a gem of

a scholar—one more fit to teach ourselves than to be taught by us.”

“Nay, worthy signor, your praise to-day falls so undeserved, that it doth but help me to the greater shame, for, thanks to these merry masking times, I have not writ a single line, or translated one page of the Attic evenings of Aulus Gellius, according to your bidding.”

“Then, by Pallas, I must punish thee,” said the old man, “and it shall be with one of my own elegies. So come here, and translate it on the instant; and if you do me injustice, according to my authorly vanity, *but in a single letter*, you shall feel that I *am* a rod—ay, marry, and what is worse, *kiss it too!*”

Bianca smiled as she seated herself beside him, and read out, with a perfect enunciation, and great fluency and elegance of diction, an impromptu translation of one of his elegies.

“Bianca,” said the old man, when she had finished, “your beautiful translation reminds me that Catherine de Medici, now queen of France, to whom my poetical works are dedicated, translated also most happily my elegies, when only your age—may her destiny prove of good augury to you!”

Whether in schools, society, courts, or camps, success makes many friends; and every one now crowded round Bianca, loudly offering

their praise and their congratulations, to all of which she listened courteously, but unmoved ; for there was one voice silent among the many that fell upon her ear. But upon raising her eyes to an opposite pillar, she encountered the looks of Bonaventuri, which spoke more eloquently to her heart than all the plaudits she had received, and instantly her face became suffused with blushes, and her limbs trembled as she rose to make way for another pupil, by the side of Bolzanio.

In crossing the room she let the book she still held fall. Pietro stooped to pick it up—their hands met ; it seemed to have the effect of electricity on both ; each felt their whole being thrill, and each trembled ; but it was not with fear, but with one of those earthquakes of feeling which arise when love for the first time leaves the child to enact the god, and, out of a chaos of vague hopes, creates a world of happiness and certainty, as, with a look—a breath—a touch, he in one bright moment achieves the work of years. Alas, well would it be if death could follow on this first breath of life, ere Sin, and her twin sister Sorrow, creep in to mar the pure beauty of Love's first creation, and banish us from the paradise of our own hearts !

Bianca regained her book ; but in doing so she had opened a volume of far deeper and dearer

lore, and lost a delicately embroidered glove, of the fate of which she for many months remained ignorant.

Bonaventuri continued to lean against the pillar, which was at the end of the bench on which Bianca sat; and was not sorry that she should hear one or two young nobles compliment him on his high favour with the Patriarch of Aquilea, and his great success at Grimani's levee that morning.

"You remember," laughed Ernesto Vasi, addressing Pietro, to get nearer to the pretty Arianna, from whom, for the last half hour, he had never removed his eyes, "the conjuror at the carnival predicted, the other night, that you would rise; and, by the soul of San Antonio, I think your star is already in the ascendant! May I fall by Borgia's dagger, if I don't think of forsaking love, as the worst trade going; one gets on so much faster in law or commerce."

"Love is not love that's born and dies in thought,
True love dares all, in hopes to conquer aught!"

replied Bonaventuri, in a low voice, with great emphasis, fixing his eyes steadily on Bianca, the crimson flush of whose face instantly assured him of all he wished to know.

"Dare! yes, I'd dare the very d—I himself," said Vasi, "if daring would do it; but, gentle

Pietro, thou seemest to forget that there must be two to play at a game of daring."

And here the young man hurled a sigh at Arianna that deranged her ringlets, without discomposing her countenance.

At this moment a great noise was heard in the hall, and a loud, imperious voice, giving directions to some gondolier, to convey somebody to the Lido, and then return.

It was the voice of Vittorio Cappello; and Bianca involuntarily quitted the vicinity of Bonaventuri, and walked over to Bolzanio's chair. She had scarcely done so, when the door opened, and the stately figure of Vittorio appeared. He was habited in the extreme of the mode—that is to say, a black velvet doublet, richly embroidered in gold, full scarlet velvet sleeves, coming from his wrists to above his elbows, where they were met by large loose flat black velvet ones; his trunk hose were of scarlet, and his shoes were white, with red heels and red rosettes. His cloak was of black velvet, embroidered in gold, and lined with scarlet taffeta. At his side hung a diamond-hilted rapier; and round his throat, beneath a very costly ruff of point d'Alençon, hung, to a chain of massive gold, the pope's golden rose, which had been sent to two members of the Cappello family, in three generations.

“ Ah, Signor Bolzanio,” said he, haughtily, making his way to the old man’s chair, without looking to the right or to the left, and pointing to his muffled foot, as it rested upon the stool, “ still hospitably bent upon entertaining your worst enemy? No wonder the knave likes to visit you so often, when he finds such comfortable quarters. Methinks, didst thou let him know the feel of a marble floor, like his companion, he would not be so ready to come to you.”

“ Alas !” replied the old man, “ he is not come ; and I am taking measures to bring him on, so that I may be the sooner rid of his abominable company.”

“ Taking measures, art thou ?” rejoined Cappello ; “ then, *corpo di Bacco* ! the best measure thou canst take will be a flask of rare Hungarian wine, sent to the ambassador by his imperial master, and by the ambassador to me ; and it shall travel still further, and lose nothing ; for it shall be with thee, Master Bolzanio, ere supper time ; and, flout me for a carp, if one single draught be not worth a whole vintage of beggarly Falernian !”

“ Ha, ha, ha !—thou art too good, Signor Vittorio,” laughed the old man ; “ and thy mode of treating my complaint doth remind me of a pleasant scene we had one day at the vatican,

when it pleased his holiness Leo the Tenth, (and, sooth to say, he often pleased himself that way,) to make merry at that poor varlet Querno's expense. You know, sirs, that Querno was his holiness's poetical buffoon; but you may not know that the crotchet took the 'gay young nobles about the court of Rome, to crown poor Querno as arch-poet. Whether it was the unlucky overthrows he had so often had from Pegasus, or the unwholesome nature of the draughts he had imbibed from the muddiest rills of Helicon, I know not, but he suffered fearfully from my tormentor, the gout. On one occasion, poor knave, he was writhing rather more than usual; but still would not forego one of the dainties his holiness was pleased daily to send him from his own table; neither would his holiness forego a single distich with which Querno was wont to repay each dish; but he was in such dolorous plight that he could get no further than one line, which ran as follows—

' Archipoeta facit versus, pro mille poetis ;'

To which his holiness, in order to help him out, replied—

' Et pro mille aliis archipoeta hibit ;'

When poor Querno, determined to shew himself superior to his sufferings, replied—

' Porrige, quod faciat mihi carmina docta Falernum.'

But still his holiness had the best of it, for he ended with this spicy repartee—

‘Hoc vinum enervat, debilitaque pedes!’*

Ha, ha, ha! Signor Cappello; and so I fear it will be with me if I follow your very palatable advice.”

“Ha, ha!” laughed Cappello; “better play the *poltron*, to use Millepropos’ favourite word, to the Tokay for ever, than lose either in your feet or your measure; for, having been a secretary, the latter might be attended with serious consequences, and being still a poet, we could ill afford to endanger the former.”

“Ah, by the bye,” said Gonzo Damerino, with his usual solemn pomposity, “what is the right meaning of that new fangled word that Millepropos is always using? If the day displeases him, it is a *poltron* of a day; if a courier brings him news that he dont like, it is a *poltron* of a despatch—and so on.”

“Why,” said Bolzanio, “I believe it was originally derived from *pollex truncatus*; but it came into vogue in France during the campaigns of his most valiant majesty Francis the

* QUERNO. “For millions of poets the archpoet composes.”

LEO. “By millions of bumpers bepimpled his nose is.”

QUERNO. “One bowl of Falernian t’ enliven my strain.”

LEO. “You lose in your *feet* what your *measure* may gain.”

First, when many peasants, to escape serving in the army, cut off their thumbs, and then *poltron* became the synonyme for coward."

"You know Bonaventuri?" said Ernesto Vasi, touching Cappello's sleeve, on perceiving that he had given the former no sign of recognition. Cappello, who remembered that he had borrowed a hundred ducats from him, and who had equally clear anticipations that they were not likely to be paid, now turned hastily round, and being, in spite of himself, attracted by the very aristocratic style of the Florentine's beauty, extended his hand with the utmost apparent cordiality, and then courteously reproached him for not having yet made his appearance at the Palazzo Cappello.

"Oh!" replied Bonaventuri, laughing, "I never think anything of an over-night invitation; and I am always afraid of intruding myself, in sober sadness, on a new acquaintance."

"You rate yourself too lowly," said Cappello, "and forget that *in vino veritas*. However," added he, taking Bianca's hand, and leading her gently forward, "here is one whose invitation you can have, at least, not the same reason for questioning. Bianca, use your best persuading to assure Signor Bonaventuri, a new acquaintance of mine, of a fitting welcome at the Casa Cappello."

“Any friend of yours, brother, must be ever welcome there,” blushed Bianca, as, for a moment, she raised her beautiful eyes to Bonaventuri’s, who, even more embarrassed than she was, merely bowed his thanks.

At this moment Gonzo Damerino—who had the happy art of always interrupting every conversation or *tête à tête*, with a mutilated *à propos de botte* quotation—for, like all persons who have few ideas of their own, he was extremely fond of making free with other people’s, but also, like the Bohemians, he had the art of so disfiguring the stolen offspring, that the real parents never could have recognised them—drawled out, “Your getting your sister to give your invitations, Cappello, reminds—me of—a—the scrolls Memmi put in the mouths of his pictures to—a—make them express his meaning—and—a—Boccaccio, you know, attributes the—a—custom to—a—the—a—waggish advice of Busalmacco, the buffoon to Le Bruno, who took the jest in earnest; and in one of his pictures, where the devil is almost expiring from his hot pursuit of a saint, he gives him a scroll, by which he exclaims—

‘Ohime! non posso pine.’

‘O dear me! I can no more!’”

As it may be supposed, nobody could see the *apropos* of this story; but the fact is, Signor

Gonzo had come into possession of it that very morning, and his was one of those generous and philanthropic dispositions, that whatever he had last read, that must he impart to every man, woman, and child he met.

At the conclusion of this piece of valuable information, all maintained a profound silence with the exception of Bianca, who, giving way to a very unrestrained laugh, which Damerino took as a just tribute to his wit, exclaimed—

“Ohime! non posso piu!”

“How, Signor Gonzo, *you* here?” said Cappello—“why, I have missed you from the Piazza, and all the festas, these two months, and they told me you were ill of a fever; but I always denied the calumny, and said I was sure you never could be so hot-headed.”

“No—yes—that is, I certainly am not apt to be hot-headed; however, *homo sum*, you know, and I don’t mean to say that I am more perfect than other people; and, indeed, the proof of it perhaps is, that I really had a fever. I was even obliged to have my head shaved, but see how thick my hair has grown again.”

“Very,” said Cappello—“almost as thick as your head.”

“No—no,” rejoined Gonzo, with a considerable degree of innocent and unsuspecting candour, “not as thick as my head, for the very

nature and texture of hair must ever be an effectual barrier to its becoming as thick as solid bone."

"Except, perhaps," gibed Cappello, "in the event of there being an ultra-sympathetic softness in both head and hair."

"Ah, well, perhaps so; but I am not at this moment prepared to argue the matter *philosophically* with you," said Gonzo, with much increased pomposity.

"Well, then," laughed Cappello, "suppose we postpone the discussion to a more convenient season. How fares your worthy step-father, the Signor Cianciare Millantatore?*" Is he always in the very depths of the *arcana imperii* of all Europe?"

"I believe there are few he is not acquainted with," said Damerino, drawing himself up with additional dignity.

"I would speak with your brother on private matters from Rome," whispered Bolzanio to Bianca, "when Gonzo has done croaking there, like one of the frogs of Aristophanes."

"What is that you are saying of me and Aristophanes, Signor Bolzanio?" said Damerino, stepping eagerly forward. The old man was greatly embarrassed, when Bianca, as much out of kindness as mischief, said, with a very

* Literally, boasting jabberer.

demure face, to the infinite amusement of all present—

“He was merely comparing your vein of comic humour, Signor Gonzo, with that of Aristophanes.”

During the universal titter which followed, Vittorio Cappello took the opportunity of saying, in a low voice, to Arianna, in which hauteur appeared to struggle with tenderness, “You look pale, bellissima; wouldst like a row, as far as the Spanish convent, on the Lido, this evening? if so, there shall be music, and as good sherbet as ever bathed a sultana’s lips, in my gondola.”

“I thank you, Signore,” said the young girl, coldly, yet with some embarrassment; “but if the Signora Bianca can spare me, I would see my father to-night.”

“Oh, just as you please,” said Vittorio, with a sneer; “and I only hope so dutiful a daughter will treasure up her father’s councils, and abide by them,” added he, bowing with an expression of mock deference and covert meaning, that sent the blood still further from Arianna’s cheek, and drove the tears into her eyes.

“By the night-cap of Apollo! (if he had one,)” said Vittorio, perceiving that half the assembled crowd were dispersing, “yon darkening clouds warn us, worthy Bolzanio, that it is time to leave you.”

“A word with you, first, illustrious sir,” replied the old man, and then whispered something in Cappello’s ear, to which the latter answered aloud—

“Ah! indeed?—then shall the Doge know it forthwith.” After which, turning to Arianna, and offering her his hand to lead her from the room, he said, as he passed Bonaventuri, “Signor, my sister awaits your courtesy to conduct her to her gondola.”

“Dear brother, how *I do love* you!” thought Bianca, as she tremblingly placed her hand, *for the first time*, in that of Bonaventuri.

“Excellent young man!” thought the latter, as he gently pressed that delicate hand within his own—“how I wish it would please thee to borrow a hundred ducats from me every day—that is, how I wish it would please the fates to enable me to lend them to thee!”

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CHAPTER V.

“ If so be that one had a pump in your bosom, I believe we should discover a foul hold. They say a witch will sail in a sieve; but I believe the devil would not venture aboard your conscience.”—CONGRÈVE.

BIANCA felt that excess of happiness on her return home which always seeks solitude to indulge in its own extravagance; and therefore, as it may be supposed, readily granted Arianna the permission she asked, to go and see her father. It was almost dark when she entered his small shop on the Rialto, where she found him in deep conference with a Spanish Jew, of the name of José Agnado. She had been so tutored never to interrupt him when occupied in what he considered the only rational aim and end of life—namely, buying and selling, that she stood some seconds on the threshold, irresolute whether to enter or go back.

“ I tell thee what, José, I would rather have the money down. I don't like these new fangled bits of paper.”

“ New fangled, goote Mashter Ferrai! Now by de shoul of Mosesh and de prophets, which are more in our line, ha, ha, ha! dey are any tings but newsh. Deshe bills of exchange were de invensions of my forefaders as far back ash ven King Dagobert did drives dem out of Franche; and in de timesh of Philip Augustush and Philip de Long—dat vosh as bad for de Ishraeliths—dey did make deesh billsh for to shecure deir monish; and dat ish as far back ash de yearsh 640, 1181, and 1313. Sho dat ish not new you shee, and if dey had not been de shafesht tings dat ish, dey voode not have lashted till now.”

“ All that may be true,” rejoined Ferrai, “ but I prefer the clank of the metal I am used to; it sounds like the voice of a friend, look'ee—and the best of all friends it surely is in this world—and, indeed, I may say the next; for can it not, praise be to the holy inquisition!” and Ferrai crossed himself, “ buy us into heaven and out of hell? But I would not make another of those ——,” here his voice dropped, and Arianna did not hear the word—“ no, not for double the sum, great as it is.”

“ Well, if you like mesh to go and tell de

Patriarch of Aquilea, or de Doge, dat you have made me vonsh, ha, ha, ha ! perhaps dey vill lent me de monish ; but 'pon my vordsh, I have not got it odervish, so you must take de billsh."

"Hush, hush, for Heaven's sake!" said Ferrai, turning deadly pale, and gathering up the papers the Jew had offered him, which he hastily locked in a strong box—"wives always tell other people's secrets to their husbands, however closely they may keep their own, and how know you but that brawling jade, the often-wedded sea, that flows beneath us, may tell her mighty spouse what would secure us six feet of stone walls beneath his palace, ere the morning?"

"I am shilent, my dear fren," replied José, with the complacency of a man who felt that he had the best of it, by having his companion in his power ; "and ash I am all for fair dealing, —how ish your pretty daughtersh ?" added he.

"Well enough, were she wise enough," said Ferrai—"but though it may be true that fortune favours fools, certès, fools do not favour fortune ; and she doth anger me hugely at the silly way she hath of flouting all the blind goddess's advances."

As their business was now evidently ended, Arianna advanced, and embracing her father, bowed slightly to José, who returned her ac-

the great, usurp their exclusive privileges of pride, arrogance, and obstinacy, it is likely to bring those belonging to them intimately acquainted with some of the pleasure and pastimes of the inquisition."

"I proud—I arrogant—I obstinate!"—said the astonished girl—"I must be worse than ungrateful, if I were; for ever since I first remember a sense of existence, I have been cradled in kindness by the Signora Bianca, and never have I heard her complain of the serious crimes you lay to my charge, father."

"The Signora Bianca!—tush! who talks of the Signora Bianca?—she is but a crude girl, like thyself; and whether young blood flows through nature's gold and porcelain vessels, or through her delf and brazen ones, 'tis but a foolish stream after all, of no account till it has mingled with the sea of time. But there are other members of the Cappello family, of far more import. The worthy Signor Bartolomeo's day of life is already on the wane; and as his shadow lengthens on the earth, his gallant son, the Signor Vittorio, walks bravely out into his father's past sunshine. He is great with the Doge, great with the Grimani, both from blood and favour, and born of many doges, he may himself die one. Venice just now is mistress of the seas—the Cappellos are masters of Venice. But power is the first

born of Plutus, and to thrive must be fed with gold. And are not the coffers of the Cappellos daily piled from the Morea, Negropont, Syria, and Egypt? One of these things were a fearful odds against a poor *filadoro*;* but thou, forsooth, must brave them all, by insulting the possessor of them, with cold looks, short answers, and long absences, when he condescends to desire thy presence."

"Never, father," interrupted Arianna, "have I failed in the respect due to the Signor Vittorio Cappello, when he has not forgotten that due to himself and to me."

"To *thee*! to *thee*!"—shouted Ferrai, mockingly taking off his cap, and bowing lowly to his daughter. "Feed thee with mushrooms in gold spoons! Marry! when grew thy dignity to such high stature? Methought that nobility, like an aloe, at least required a century ere it bloomed; but thou seemest to have plucked it on a sudden from the moon, so to set thyself upon a level with the greatest lord in Venice."

"Father, to dignity I have no claim; but, for that fair heritage of honour which God doth award to us all, I hope never to die with less than I have lived."

"Now, by her soul, which Heaven rest! but

* Gold wire drawer.

thy mother was just such another simpleton. I should marvel at thee! Is't in thy rubric of honour, forsooth, to be an ingrate?—and canst deny the rich gifts the Signor Vittorio has, times and often, heaped upon thee?”

“I do deny them,” said Arianna, with a calm voice, but flashing eye; “for gifts, like merchants’ bills, are null till they are accepted; and none did I ever accept from the Signor Vittorio.”

“This to my face!” cried Ferrai, pacing up and down the narrow shop, and abstractedly placing and displacing several glass-cases of Jewellery—“this to my face! No wonder the signor was graciously pleased, even last night, to honour my poor tenement, by lodging his complaint of your insufferable frowardness, and bid me look to it; but no doubt,” added he, snapping his fingers, “this is more of your wisdom; and your reason for rejecting his wondrous kindness is, that you despise such gauds and toys as, for the most part, do delight your silly sex.”

“Not so, father—I despise them not; but I do value mine honour more.”

“Honour again!” sneered Ferrai; “it seems to weigh with thee so plaguily, that thinkest thou not ’twould be quite as safe in Signor Vittorio’s keeping as in thine?”

“ This from you !” said Arianna, bursting into tears, and covering her face with her hands.

Ferrai perceived that he had clumsily exceeded his warrant ; for, though it is true that Vittorio Cappello, knowing his total want of all principle, and ever having found him a willing tool, had complained of Arianna’s cold rejection of all his overtures, and ordered him to exert his parental authority with her to pursue a different line of conduct ; yet, being aware of the sensitive delicacy of her nature, far more than her coarse-minded and unnatural father, he had at the same time cautioned him against outraging her feelings, or startling her sense of propriety, both of which having most effectually done, he now placed his arm round her waist, from which she involuntarily recoiled, and said—

“ Come, come, child—I did not mean exactly *that* !—I only meant to reprove thee, who art but a chicken, for playing the owl ; but dry thine eyes, for I have business at the Casa Salviati, and so will accompany thee home ; but, let me warn thee, unless thou art resolved that my bones shall help to pave the dungeons of the inquisition, preserve a civil bearing towards the Signor Vittorio.”

Arianna said nothing, for her heart was too full ; but walked silently out, beside her father.

"Didst walk here, or come by water?" asked the latter, when they had reached the foot of the bridge.

"I came by water; the gondola is there."

"Well, then, so we will return," said Ferrai, turning down to the wharf; "for I have no fancy for the streets at night, where, mayhap, stilettos are as plentiful as stars."

They entered the boat in silence, which might have continued, but that Ferrai began to whistle a barcarole—not exactly for want of thought, but because his thoughts were rather of an embarrassing nature, and he was labouring under a certain degree of fear—*that only conscience of the bad*. He continued to whistle till they passed the house of Tintoretto, when, going under the Bridge of Sighs, a sort of suppressed or muffled shriek fell upon their ear. "Listen!" cried Ferrai, grasping Arianna's arm; "unless that thou wilt that I should make such music, see that thou playest Signor Vittorio more skilfully than thou hast hitherto done."

A shudder was Arianna's only answer, as she placed her hand, which was cold and rigid as that of death, in her father's, as he helped her out of the gondola; and, leaving her with a hurried kiss, and a *felice notte* (which she

was not very likely to have) in the spacious hall of the Palazzo Cappello, he walked through it, and passed on to the house of Salviati.

“Is the Signor Baptista Bonaventuri at home?” asked Ferrai of a fat porter who lay half asleep on one of the benches.

“Ay, marry is he, Master Giovanni, and busy at the working of miracles. He is at supper; that is no miracle, for on an average he indulgeth in the excess of eating once a day. Signor Salviati lodges him, therefore is he ever at home; but he feedeth himself, for which reason he employeth more discretion than to be always at it; but the miracles are these, and put San Marcus as much out of joint as is his nose in the Mosaic: first, in comes his nephew in such gallant trim as at another time would have set Baptista, out of sheer fear for the family, hoarding double scrapings for a month, instead of which it was, ‘Be seated, nephew, I pray you—what news, *worthy* Pietro?’ and such like sweet words, all wrapped up in satin courtesies; then, turning to Gaetano, who was busy scraping the mould off the bread for supper, he said, ‘’Tis not so healthful, but Signor Pietro liketh newer bread—see that we have it!’—Whereupon, poor Gaetano was so frightened, as it were, with the unusual strangeness of the order, that, lo! he let bread, trencher and all, fall to the ground,

where the platter broke into a thousand pieces ; still Baptista reproved him not, but bid him quit the room, and leave him with his *dear* nephew. His dear nephew—there's for you ! Now comes miracle the second : when Gaetano returned, he said, ' Signor Pietro must sup with me ;' whereat Signor Pietro, who no doubt felt marvellously hungry, was for excusing himself at all hazards ; but Baptista insisted, and said to Gaetano, ' Hie thee to the vintner's, at the Riva degli Schiavoni, and bring from thence a flask of ipocras ; next, see Salviati's Maestro di Casa, and try and arrange with him, at a discreet price, to let us have some slices of boar's head, and a galentine of barnacles, peacocks' brains, and truffles, for supper.' Ha ! ha ! ha !" concluded the fat porter, holding his sides, " Signor Salviati had better look out for another book-keeper, for if Baptista does not die of a complaint in the chest, one way or the other, after this excess, then is my name not Bonifacio Quaglia !"

" Ha, ha, ha ! then it would seem that I have come at the right time !" laughed Ferrai, " for *certainly* it is a *festa* that does not happen every day !" And so saying he walked on to the end of the hall, where, opening a door that led into a spacious room, he beheld at the upper end of it, by the dim light of a solitary lamp

the wizen figure and lean-hungry face of Baptista Bonaventuri, in his usual rusty black garments, seated at a small table laid for supper opposite. His handsome and gaily attired nephew was leaning carelessly back in the high stiff chair in which he sat, giving himself and it an air of ease by leaning over the right arm of it, and placing his cap before his mouth to hide the yawns he found it impossible to suppress; but both the old man's elbows rested on the table, and his face in his hands, as his small keen eyes were occupied in perusing the face of his nephew. Ferrai advanced with his usual prowling walk, obsequious downward bend of the head, and universally vulpine bearing, that would have done credit to the most ancient fox that ever depopulated a farm yard, and after uttering a thousand "*illustrissimi signori*," he at length succeeded in making Baptista aware of his presence.

"Ah, honest Giovanni, you are welcome!" said the latter; "by Santa Maria Zobenigo, you were uppermost in my thoughts! Be seated, pray; a cup of wine—'tis the best channel through which business flows." And here the old man whispered Ferrai, who merely gave a satisfied nod of the head, and answered aloud by declining the proffered wine that Baptista had poured out.

of a nephew with it, without even consulting me; and when I heard it, you may guess the mortal fear I was in, lest he should commit some plebeian blunder, and so anger his worthiness. This thought seemed to have got to my fingers' ends, for every ducat I touched slipped through them, and I had to count each rouleau ten times over—when lo! first comes in one gallant, and then another, with, 'Signor Baptista, I do felicitate you on your nephew's high favour with the Grimani; we are straight from his levee, where we did see the Patriarch linked arm in arm with the Signor Pietro; and more than once did he stop, in his progress to the presence chamber, and seem to consult him privately.' Still did I think that this might be—nay, was, some modish banter, or the very wrong side of the truth, when, straight on his return from the council, the Patriarch sends for Salviati, bidding him bring the inventor of the key with him. And I do assure thee, worthy Giovanni, it was not till his worthiness had assured me, over and over again, of his perfect satisfaction—both with the inventor and the artificer, that I gave over trembling like an aspen tree. But he so *repeatedly* reiterated the question of, whether I could *swear* that the secret of its construction was confined to thee and me; and I so repeatedly assured him that

thou hadst not employed any hands in the work but thine own, that I at length made bold to ask, if it were possible he meant to employ those locks for the whole of the prison, for, from the massiveness of the silver, and the intricacy of the workmanship, the cost would be enormous. He said, No; that it was merely to secure the dungeon of a Spanish prisoner of some note; and then again tested me as to the construction of the lock being known to only thee and me. But what hast thou, honest Giovanni?—thou seemest ill at ease,—another cup of wine?

A deadly pallor had, indeed, spread itself over the countenance of Ferrai, as he remembered how, for the bribe of five hundred ducats, he had made a similar lock and key for Agnado, the Spanish Jew, who had assured him, in the solemnest manner, that, in a few days, he was about to sail for Spain; but now that he had heard that the Inquisition of Venice had ordered this complicated and mysterious key for the better security of a Spanish prisoner, a fearful light seemed to break in upon the appalled jeweller, at the dire consequences he might have entailed upon himself by his accursed love of gold. José, who had on more than one occasion found Ferrai, late at night, at work on this key, had at length artfully, by

dint of bribes, wormed the secret out of him ; and next, for the (to Ferrai) irresistible sum of five hundred golden ducats, got him to construct him a similar one to that he was making for the Venetian senate, saying he wished to take so valuable a treasure to Madrid, where it would make his fortune without ever injuring Ferrai. But now this story only seemed to the latter a wily pretext to possess the key, in order to release his captive countryman. He resolved, therefore, that very night to seek out the Jew, and, at all hazards, re-possess himself of what might prove so fatal an instrument of destruction to him. These thoughts passed rapidly and sharply through his brain, as he filled out another glass of wine, and, in answer to the old miser's question, replied, with outward calmness—

“ 'Tis nothing, Signor Baptista—merely a spasm which this wine will dissipate ; but the reward, worthy signor, the reward ?—what said the Patriarch touching that ? ”

“ Ah ! the reward,” replied Baptista, filling for himself, with a trembling hand, more wine, which was already beginning to affect a brain so little used to such generous drink—“ yes, the reward. His worthiness was graciously pleased to decide—and you know, honest Giovanni, it was not for me to gainsay him—that the artificer should just have half the sum of the

inventor—that is, that thou shouldst have three hundred ducats. I assure you I am sorry such was his decision, for I love my friends as myself.”

“No one ever doubted it,” said Ferrai, ironically; “three hundred!—three hundred!” continued he, as he musingly pulled his under lip, “why, ’twill hardly pay me, especially if I lose the five hundred.”

“Eh?” hiccupped Baptista, who was by this time more than half intoxicated—“who talks of five hundred? I said three, didn’t I?”

“You did,” replied Ferrai, upon whom the question was not, however, lost, “and after that no one can doubt the Patriarch’s prudence.”

“Nay, it is a goodly sum, and a round and a creditable,” said the old man, as he drained, with a trembling hand, another goblet.

“Yes, Signor Baptista,” your six hundred cometh under that denomination.”

“Mine! oh no,” said the old man, who had now become quite maudlin, crying, and throwing his arms round Ferrai’s neck; “I am miserably poor—miserably poor, you know; kept so by an extravagant nephew, who must get money from the d—l, for I don’t know where he gets it,—and by a beggarly brother, who is always asking me to help him—and where should I have been if I had? Whew! whew! whew!—it’s terrible to think of—terrible to think of—

but for these thousand ducats of the Patriarch's——"

"A *thousand* ducats, is it?" interrupted Ferrai.

"Yes, yes—*mine*; but thine is but the half, honest Giovanni, thou knowest——"

"True; but my memory is as slippery as an eel, so just write me a little memorandum of it, Signor Baptista, lest to-morrow I should confound thy thousand with my five hundred."

"Eh, eh! that must not be!" said the old man, rousing himself, and twitching his fingers—"Give me the pen and inkhorn yonder, and I'll make it all clear."

Ferrai instantly placed the writing materials before Baptista, whose ideas were so confused that he was some time before he could collect them sufficiently to put down on paper the words the jeweller dictated, which were as follow:—

"I, Baptista Bonaventuri, promise to pay to Giovanni Ferrai, jeweller on the Rialto, at sight, the sum of five hundred ducats (500 *d.*) on account of his worthiness the Patriarch of Aquilea, for value received from the said Giovanni Ferrai."

"Now, Signor Baptista, there can be no mistake about your thousand," chuckled Ferrai, as he secured the paper in his note-book, and replaced the latter in his bosom.

“No, no—none, good Giovanni: but I am miserably poor—miserably poor! Nevertheless, what little I have—though God knows that is next to nothing!—that will I leave thee, if thou wilt help me up to bed, and see that nought be left about: and that lamp—put it out, put it out!—that spendthrift Pietro lit it. Take one from the corridor,” added he, in a hollow whisper—“they are Salviati’s;” and then, scrambling up two or three apostle spoons which lay on the table, and cramming them into his bosom, he bade Ferrai put all the viands that were left into one dish, and bring it with him. It was a work of time to get the miserable old man up stairs, from his frequent stoppages to assure Giovanni that he would leave him the little he had, and that if Salviati died first, and he succeeded to the whole of his business, he should instantly sell his splendid palazzo, pictures, and statues; and that, indeed, might make his poor savings a little more.”

“Sleep away, thou old grappling-iron,” said Ferrai, as he closed the bedroom door on Baptista, “and it is no great matter if thou never awakest; and for thy last piece of villany, in trying to cheat a poor artisan like me out of two hundred ducats—why, mayst thou know the security of thine own precious key before death has secured thee under a safer.”

On leaving the Casa Salviati, he lost no time in repairing to the Jew's house, but he was out. Baptista seemed to have stolen Ferrai's share of sleep as well as wine, for none visited the latter that night; and by the first gray dawning of the morning, he was again stirring, and on his way to the Jew's house. He found him still in bed, and asleep. To his surprise, he perceived that he wore a hair shirt, and upon a closer examination, he discovered a small but massive gold crucifix round his neck.

"Ho! Signor Agnado—Signor José, arouse thee: I come on business," cried the jeweller, shaking the sleeping man.

"*Madre di Dio!*" said José, starting up.

"How is this, señor?" asked Ferrai. "Waking, you are, as the devil well knows, every inch a Jew, yet you seem to fall asleep in the true faith, and swear good Christian oaths in your dreams!"

"Oh, oh! Mashter Ferrai, my ver goot fren," said José, who was by this time perfectly awake, "I shee you shurprishe, and no wonder, at sheing me with deshe tings, but I did puy teshe tingsh, dish hair shirt and crucifix, ash a pre-shents to a Spanish friar in Valladolid, and I do put dem on to shee how it wash posshibles for dem to bear such tings; and by de shouls of

my fadershs, I would not wear dem anoders night for all de goldsh in Mexico."

"Ah, very likely not," said Ferrai—too full of his own business to be very critical as to the probability or improbability of Agnado's statement; "but I have brought you back your bills, Señor José, and want back my key—for my mind misgives me, but it will bring me acquainted with more misfortune than five hundred ducats can cover."

"*Your* key, my ver goot fren," said José, elevating his eyebrows and shoulders, with a look intended to convey an idea of betrayed confidence—"No, no; a pargain is a pargain; it *ish my key*, and I shall keep him. I have paid enough for him, and vot more can you deshire?"

"If," replied Ferrai, who saw that force would gain him nothing—"if I could be sure that you were really going to Spain——?"

"Shure, my dear fren! why, I shall shew you de agreement for my passage in de good ship Guadalquiver, which now ridesh at anchor in your sheas, but which shails for Cadiz to-morrow night"—and here José, stretching out his hand, took from a chair beside his bed a vest, in which was deposited the agreement in question, which he shewed to the jeweller, and which in some measure appeared to satisfy him.

“ Well,” said Ferrai, turning the before-mentioned agreement in every direction, so as the better to examine its validity—“ I suppose I may see you on board ?”

“ Certes, it ish de ver leasht I expec of your friendships.”

This satisfied Ferrai, who returned to his shop, there to await, as patiently as he might, the hour for the receipt of custom. When he proceeded to Salviati's to secure the five hundred ducats, for which he had, on the preceding night, so dexterously contrived to obtain Baptista's promissory note, he found the old man, not, as usual, busy with his assets, but with his elbows leaning on his desk, and his aching head placed within his trembling hands.

“ Ah, honest Giovanni,” said he, at the jeweller's approach, you find me in woful plight ! I have been robbed over night.”

“ Robbed !” repeated Ferrai.

“ Ay—by Bacchus,” rejoined Baptista, with an awkward attempt at pleasantry, and his usual hollow libel on a laugh, “ by Bacchus, honest Master Giovanni ; the knave hath stolen away both mine ease and sense ; for there is a splitting sensation in my head, like to the lashing of the waves against the larch foundation of our city ; and as for figures—if thou tell'st me that two and two make four, why, I'll e'en believe it

on thy word, for as to prove it, that's beyond me."

" 'Tis well your honour and honesty are so noted, Signor Baptista," said Ferrai, ironically, "that a poor man like myself can trust to them, without resorting to any scrivening precautions; for it so happens, that, having some merchandise to settle for, I must e'en trouble you this very morning for my share of the reward his worthiness the Patriarch was pleased to bestow upon my humble endeavours to execute your great design."

"Oh—ah—yes—certainly! Did I mention to you the sum, honest Master Giovanni?"

"You were good enough to do so only last night," replied Ferrai, bowing obsequiously, while he kept his eyes fixed on the old man's face.

"True, true; I remember!—three hundred ducats."

"Five! or my memory fails me," replied Ferrai.

"Three—three, good Master Giovanni! But, 'sdeath, I see the vine-crowned knave hath robbed thee too," said Baptista, with a rattling chuckle, as he poked his skinny fore finger into the jeweller's sleek side. .

"Here is what will decide the matter better than either of us," said Ferrai, drawing Bap-

tista's bill from his note-book, and holding it up before the old man's eyes,—“ five hundred, under your own hand, Signor Baptista.”

“ 'Tis villanous !” cried the old man, shaking his clenched hand, and losing his temper at finding he had over-reached himself, “ 'tis villanous to take advantage of a man's hospitality, and make an extra draught of wine the forger of such a draft as this.”

“ Nay, be not extravagant, even in words, Signor Baptista,” said Ferrai, calmly replacing the draft in his note-case ; “ I am not the man to take an unfair advantage of any one, else why should the very stones of Venice have grown smooth from the steps of those who call me *honest* Giovanni Ferrai—your equitable self among the number ? And least of all would I take advantage of you ; for which reason I'll hie me straight to the Patriarch, and crave the largesse from his worthiness' own hand, and then there can be no mistake.”

“ Stop, stop !—no, no !—why so fast ?” cried Baptista, in much trepidation,—well knowing that if Ferrai lodged his complaint before the Patriarch, it could not fail to appear that he had endeavoured to defraud him out of two hundred ducats ; and that, besides the summary punishment that this would inevitably entail upon him, it would also do him the more serious harm of irretrievably

injuring his credit,—“the most correct are liable to make mistakes. Let me see the draft again, and if five hundred ducats are therein fairly writ, they shall be yours on the instant,” said the old man, taking it into his hands, and muttering the contents audibly, as he glanced his eye hurriedly over it. “Um, um—five hundred! It is five hundred, and five hundred you must have, Master Giovanni,” concluded Baptista, as he, with a groan, unlocked an iron chest, and counted out the money to Ferrai, who had scarcely conveyed the last ducat into a large leathern bag, which he had brought for the purpose, when, some merchants entering on business, he hurried him to depart, which he was not sorry to do, having so perfectly succeeded in his errand. And as fortune generally favours the bad, as well as the bold, at least for a time, (and a pretty long time, too, in some instances,) the jeweller had the additional satisfaction of conducting José Agnado on board the *Guadalquiver*, on the following night. And after that goodly ship had weighed anchor, and fairly put to sea some four and twenty hours, Ferrai began to think that there was no more convenient place in the whole world, for himself and his recently acquired thousand ducats, than Venice; and no music more delightful than the bells of St. Mark’s old cathedral.

CHAPTER VI.

" She opens her lattice,
And stands in the glow
Of the moonlight and starlight,
A statue of snow ;
And she speaks in a voice
That is broken with sighs,
As she turns on her lover
The light of her eyes."

" And now I will unclasp a secret book,
And to your quick-conceiving discontents,
I'll read you matter deep and dangerous."

SHAKESPEARE.

RAPID as the growth of all things is in Italy, the growth of love is the most rapid of all ; and it is perhaps for this reason that, like southern fruits, it is neither of so high nor of so enduring a quality as the productions of slower growth and colder climes. In no country are girls so completely immured as in Italy ; and yet in no country does the master-passion visit them so early. Though Bianca was only sixteen, she was

an Italian of sixteen; and her heart, touched by the same sun as the orange trees, put forth all its leaves, blossoms, and fruit, at once. Her home was a sort of splendid desolation. Her father was cold, pre-occupied, and almost ever absent in the senate. Her brother, though fond of her in his way, was imperious and overbearing, and loved her more because she was the beautiful Bianca Cappello, and his sister, than because in infancy they had played and cried together, and in childhood their hopes and fears had been one. But all this had been a negative misery, but for the positive and never-ending persecutions of her step-mother, who rejoiced in one of those tempers that fretted all within its sphere, as a moth doth a garment.

Arianna was all that was kind, gentle, and affectionate; but she was only a mirror who could faithfully reflect and give back her young mistress's sensations. She had no power to create feelings wherewith to fill the unpeopled world of her heart; it was therefore little to be wondered at that looks so devoted and sighs so impassioned as Bonaventuri's, for the whole year that she had met him at Bolzanio's school, should have succeeded, not only in filling, but in crowding the unoccupied void; but though her

“————— winged thoughts
Flew to him ten thousand in an hour,”

yet was his obscure birth a dark cloud through which the sunlight of love had for a long time a difficulty in struggling; but no sooner had the first ray pierced through this density in the shape of her brother's introduction to him, than her whole being became flooded, as it were, with a light, the warmth and intensity of which she did not even attempt to resist; and, in a few days after that event, Bonaventuri was the open visitor of Vittorio Cappello, and the secret lover of his sister. It was just one little week after the levee of the Patriarch of Aquileia, and already had half a volume of *billets-doux* passed between the lovers, for sending and receiving which, Bonaventuri, like a true lover, made the opportunities he did not find. Meanwhile, the French Ambassador, who had nothing to do but openly press his suit, with every prospect of being well received—at least, by Signor Bartolomeo and his son—preferred giving the business the romantic tinge of mystery, and therefore had recourse to flowers, confessionals, and pages, as the mediums of conveying his effusions, which, for all the impediment they would have met with, except, indeed, on the part of the lady, he might have sent in his state gondola, and under the auspices of his secretary.

It was a lovely night; and as the moonbeams played with the dancing waves, the sleeping

city seemed rocked on a bed of silver, and canopied with stars, when Bonaventuri himself steered his gondola under the shadow of a projecting ground-floor window of the Palazzo Cappello, from which a light came faintly gleaming through the blinds. He had hardly taken his station when another gondola neared the steps of the palazzo, with muffled oars. Presently a young page sprang to the landing, and a hand, which from its extreme attenuation and multiplicity of rings Bonaventuri recognised as belonging to the Marquis de Millepropos, was extended from the boat, to place a note in that of the page. Swift as lightning, Pietro, who from being in the shade was quite concealed from view, sprang upon the steps, and placing himself in the doorway, as though he had belonged to the establishment, carelessly asked the page his business.

“*Zitto ! Zitto !*—hush, hush,” said the page, mysteriously; “this note is for the Signora Bianca: will you have the goodness to take it to her?”

“That I cannot do,” rejoined Bonaventuri, shaking his head, but at the same time taking the ambassador’s note out of the boy’s hand, and dexterously returning him one of his own instead—“you must take it yourself; and at the end of the hall, near her apartments, no doubt

you will find the Signora Bianca's dwarf; give it to him, and wait an answer."

"Bene, bene," nodded the boy, who, never doubting but that he was the bearer of his master's credentials, walked on, and did as he was desired; while Bonaventuri, stepping within the hall, which at that hour was untenanted, undid the silken cord that bound the ambassador's biglietto, and amused himself by reading a very ridiculous love-letter, signed "your servitor, slave, and dog, Millepropos."

Bonaventuri smiled, as he carefully refolded the letter, and retraced his footsteps back to the door-way, there to await the return of the page, who at the expiration of ten minutes appeared, bearing another note in his hand, which he perceiving, hastily struck the boy's arm, and caused him to drop the note, while Bonaventuri lost no time in picking it up, and presenting him with the French Ambassador's original note in exchange, exclaiming—"A thousand pardons, sir page; but I saw an immense tarantula on your sleeve, and as I suffer dreadfully from those creatures myself, I feared it might do you an injury. I hope I did not shake you too rudely."

"You are too good, signor—I am ever your debtor," replied the unsuspecting page, as he

hurried on to the gondola, where Bonaventuri had the pleasure of seeing the *marquis* passionately kiss his own note ; till, unfolding it to the light of the moon, he burst into a storm of oaths, on perusing his own paper, his own words !
*“ Ah ! mais c’est une tour indigne ! La France même est insultée dans ma personne !—*If this had happened in the days of Francis the First, France would have gone to war about it !”

What further reflections his excellency made on the occasion, Pietro remained ignorant of, as the noiseless gondola, with its muffled oars, swiftly moved out of sight and hearing ; but the light still gleaming from the basement window of the Palazzo Cappello, he took his guitar and sang the following serenade :—

The gentle moon is bright, lady,
 And my boat is on the sea ;
 What lack I then to-night, lady,
 But one dear look from thee ?

For the very stars above us—
 Aye seem dim to mortal gaze,
 Unless the eyes that love us
 Beam out beneath their rays.

And the rose that’s called the sweetest
 Still seems scentless all to me,
 Unless a breath the fleetest
 Pass o’er its leaves from thee.

Then come, while the moon is beaming,
And Love doth his vigil keep
O'er young hearts that are dreaming,
Dreams too bright, too fond, for sleep !

He had scarcely repeated the last stanza of the serenade ere the light that had gleamed through the blinds was suddenly extinguished, the window gently opened, and a slight female figure, concealed by a black veil, appeared in the balcony. Another moment, and Bonaventuri, who had steered his gondola completely under the balcony, seized one of the stone balustrades, cleared the balcony, and was at her side.

"*Bell'idol mio !*" were the first and only words which for some instants he could utter, as his arm encircled Bianca's waist, and her trembling lips met his. But soon she ceased to tremble, as she ceased to fear ; for in the Circean draught of love's first kiss, do not the past, the present, and the future, seem merged in one bright eternity, till they lose all affinity with the things of time ?

"Oh ! Pietro, if you should ever cease to love me !" sighed Bianca, who was the first to speak.

"*If* the stars should ever cease to shine !" interrupted Bonaventuri, solving the problem with a kiss.

"Ah ! all men can *swear* eternal love, else

were none ever perjured," said Bianca, with a melancholy smile; "but I have risked too much for you to be satisfied with that mere fluttering of the heart, which lasts through the sunny hours of life, and droops 'neath its storms, which some mistake for love. If you think your heart can ever change, oh, let not false hope linger, sowing her cruel harvest of vanished rest and blighted years. For you I have passed a terrible rubicon! To forego wealth, power, station, is but a grain, when weighed against the ingot of your love! A father's curse and the world's scorn!—these, indeed, are terrible!—but even these would be but phantoms could I *be sure* of the *reality*, of the *duration*, of your affection."

"Nay, dearest!" interrupted her lover, "as for its duration, life itself must cease, and with it *perhaps* my love; for I pretend not to scan the mysteries of the grave; but as for changing!—when flowers grow in the sky, and stars glitter on the earth,—when the meadows murmur, and the sea is silent,—when the breath of May blights the blossoms, and the winter's blast expands them,—when the tiger becomes faithful, and the dog treacherous,—in short, when all nature shall be changed,—then, but not till then, will my love change!"

"So says the *present*," murmured Bianca,

though in her heart hope yielded to the low sweet music of Pietro's voice, "but what tale will the future tell? it may know nothing of these blissful moments; but what memory in mockery can recall, when perchance your vows and my heart alike will be broken; for poverty is a savage victor, that too often razes the altar of love, and destroys the illusions of its most hallowed mysteries."

"Bianca! *my* Bianca!—is not all earth, nay, all heaven, at least to me, comprised in you!—to see you—hear you—call you mine! Poverty, misfortune, persecution, let them come, they will be but so many ties to strengthen our hearts in hours of grief;—in short, they are but rings of adamant, that rivet the golden links of love's strong chain. I feel as I must ever feel, to the fullest extent, the great, the wondrous sacrifices you make for me; yet in that consists my only merit, for but that *you* have set so high a value on me, surely were I wholly valueless."

"I would I had been born less or more than what I am," sighed Bianca. "With sovereign power, I might have raised thee to what eminence I pleased; but as it is, being myself but the poor appendage of greatness, I fear I only lure thee to a gulf that may o'erwhelm us both. The world, Pietro—the cold, bitter, scornful world—think how we must bear and brave its

buffets, when once the Republic has issued its fiat against us !”

“The power of the Republic has its limits,” replied Bonaventuri, “and once within the walls of my native city, we’ll see if the power of the Medici be not of equal magnitude. But why talk of the world, dearest? Hast never seen the map of China? It takes up immeasurable space, and at one corner of it is a small nook, which they modestly call—*the rest of the world*. Love’s empire is on the same plan; *it* occupies an almost boundless extent, and for the little speck beyond, which composes the rest of the world, it is too insignificant to care about!”

A faint smile passed over Bianca’s face, as she shook her head, and said, “Ah! but that little insignificant speck may make us care for it, as it generally does all those on whom it thinks fit to exercise its power. And if we should fail in escaping from Venice—or in reaching your city of refuge—then, indeed, are we lost!”

“But I feel we *cannot* fail, sweet love; for thou hast the fire of the eagle, as well as the gentleness of the dove. And as for me! with thee at my side I could beard the Patriarch of Aquilea himself, ay, and his twelve canons to boot!”

“But the Inquisition, Pietro—the Inquisi-

tion! Or my brother's dagger! for there is nothing his hot anger would not attempt!" And the beautiful Venetian shuddered, as her head sunk on Bonaventuri's shoulder.

"I should indeed deserve the worst from both, were I such a bungler as to fail when you are the stake! We will do nothing hastily—nothing rashly—all shall be thoroughly arranged beyond the possibility of defeat or failure."

"To have my name erased as a noble daughter of San Marco is the least I can expect," said Bianca, with a sigh.

"To be inscribed in my heart, from whence it can never be erased!" interrupted Bonaventuri, as he kissed the sigh from her beautiful lips, and drew the delicate waist his arm encircled more closely to him. "But tell me, dearest," added he, in a gayer tone, "whose was the hand that flung the flowers from the gondola on the first night of the carnival, and the voice that bade me so uncourteously return home? for, certes, they were not gentle enough for yours; and I consume with jealousy till I know."

"No greater a personage," smiled Bianca, "than Ghiribizzo, my dwarf, who, to say the truth, is up to anything, from melon-stealing to manslaughter; so it was lucky for you that no more formidable missile was at hand than a bunch of violets, which had always been des-

tined, not exactly for your head, but certainly for your hands."

"Enchanting dwarf!" exclaimed Bonaventuri, "henceforth I shall think every man that doth exceed thy stature, be it but by half an inch, labours under a vulgar superfluity of height, that doth insult all symmetry."

"Hush!" said Bianca. "What was that?"

"The wind, dearest, if anything, but I heard nothing."

"Listen!"

Here the growl of one of Bianca's little dogs was distinctly heard; a hasty kiss on the part of Bonaventuri formed their only *adieux*; in another moment, Bianca had retreated within the window, and her lover had dropped from the balcony into his gondola as swiftly as he had ascended, and was half-way to the Lido before the clock of a neighbouring church, chiming the half-hour after midnight, reminded him of the appointment, or rather imperious command, of the mysterious personage he had met at the levee of the Patriarch of Aquilea, to be in the Vicolo del Cocomero in half-an-hour from that time; and the curiosity, which a deeper feeling had for the last few days absorbed, revived in all its force, as he put about the gondola and retraced his way over the now almost silent sea, whose gently undulating waves

seemed to rock the dreamy moonlight into a slumber, hushed and calm as a child's repose. He was alone upon that voiceless sea; not a sound was there save the stealthy stroke of his own oar, which broke on the air as faintly as the echo of a lover's sigh. To be alone with night, even the softest and most beautiful that ever glanced through the starry veil of heaven, though it brings nought of fear, has much of awe, for it is impossible to divest oneself of the idea that its very silence is whispering some of the mysteries of our own fate. This idea was doubly strong in Bonaventuri at this moment, for on that night he had for the first time been with Bianca two hours alone; and that in itself was an epoch! Then the stranger's mysterious words rang in his ears:—" *Pietro Bonaventuri, thou gropest in the dark; but if thou hast courage, be in the Via del Cocomero, on the water side, one hour after midnight this day week, and I will give thee light to find that thou seekest: but breathe to mortal ear that thou comest, or a syllable of what I now say, and the ever-ready death-boat that lies moored under the Bridge of Sighs shall be thy reward!*"

"'Tis strange, *very* strange," thought Bonaventuri; "for how should he know that I sought anything more than the ordinary mosaic of

business and pleasure, that constitutes most men's pursuit. And then his accurate knowledge of my name too! that indeed is passing strange—but tush, what of that? I'm not going to turn child again, and believe the old women's fable, that the devil is his own *maestro di casa*, and goes to market in *propria personæ* to drive hard bargains for his standing dish of fried souls. *Cappita, illustrissimo Signor Diavolo!*" said he, aloud, as he shot under the little bridge at the corner of the Via del Cocomero; "but if thou hast an unconquerable fancy for me, thou shalt buy me dearly, I promise thee, and be nothing the better of thy bargain after all. Ecco! here we are!" and he neared the boat to the landing, and sprang upon the first of the much-broken flight of steps of a narrow doorway. The door itself, which had not been guilty of paint for many years, but had once been gaudily coloured, and still could boast a small rusty Jew's-harp-shaped knocker, and a deer's foot attached to the end of an iron chain, which gave notice of a bell, was now shut; and Bonaventuri was at a loss to know whether he should apply to the deer's foot for admittance, or patiently await the coming or pleasure of the strange being who had invoked him; but recollecting all his injunctions to secrecy, backed by such terrible threats, he

resolved upon the latter course; and so remained upon the steps for about ten minutes, watching the moonlight as it struggled round the narrow corner of the wharf, and illuminated the high dark walls of an opposite building; at length he began to think he had been lured there on a fool's errand, and was deliberating whether he should not return home, when the door against which he was leaning, suddenly, but gently, gave way, and he had only time to recover his perpendicular position when it was hastily opened, a hand extended, and a voice said, "Enter;" which having done, he found himself in a (for Venice) narrow, but highly vaulted hall, alone with the mysterious being who had addressed him at the Patriarch's levee, and who looked, if possible, paler than he had done then, as the light from a small bronze Greek lamp, that he held, gleamed on his countenance.

"Thou hast done well!" were the only words he uttered, as he made a sign with his hand for Bonaventuri to follow him up a flight of narrow and winding stairs—evidently not the common staircase of the house, as at the foot it was concealed by a small door, which the stranger carefully locked after him.

To do the young Florentine justice, fear was a vulgar feeling with which he was totally unac-

quainted, and his courage rather rose than sank as the peril, or at least the equivocality of his position seemed to increase. After ascending several flights of steps, their progress was at length impeded by a dead wall, in which was a small iron door, which the stranger unlocked, and, throwing open, nodded to Bonaventuri to follow, who found himself in a sort of observatory. Two or three Egyptian mummies glared from the walls, above which was a sort of armory of sword-fishes and crocodiles. At the upper end of the room was the huge skeleton of an hippopotamus, round whose throat was a necklace of dried bats, scorpions, and chameleons. The floor and tables were strewn with mathematical instruments; there were also some retorts and other chemical apparatus, with several large terrestrial and celestial globes. On the chief table, which was one of ponderous dimensions, and of black oak, were books and parchments innumerable, and one volume of colossal size, with seventy-eight glittering metallic plates, engraved with different hieroglyphics—being, in fact, an exact copy of the Egyptian Encyclopædia, or Book of Thot, that was placed in the Temple of Fire at Memphis, and which has been the origin of all theology, geology, metaphysics, physiology, astrology, astronomy, and ethics.

“Pietro Bonaventuri, be seated,” said the stranger, placing himself in a large high-backed chair, and pointing to another at the opposite side of the table. “Let me see,” added he, turning to a horoscope clearly drawn out on vellum, and occasionally glancing from it to the metallic plates of the Book of Thot—“let me see: you were born on the eighteenth of May, 1589, at three minutes past ten in the forenoon, so that you are now, at the time of speaking, exactly twenty years and nine months old—hem! ém! Ten months more—ten months more; that will bring it to the thirteenth of next December,” continued the stranger, muttering some calculation to himself. “Nay, start not, nor run into the vulgar error of taking me for a magician, or even a diviner of future events; for to divine implies a creative power, which no man hath—and I am but a man, like thyself, though, perchance, skilled in reading the great book of Nature, which to thee, as to the mass of mankind, is a sealed volume; and there is no more magic in reading the stars than there is in navigating by the compass. It is not necessary that I should give you the arguments of Chrysippus, Diogenes, and Antipater, on this science—but it is necessary that I should not mystify you into the ignorance of superstition, which may be fairly denominated profane

bigotry; and were there aught of the kind in the science of astrology, as taught in that transcript of nature, the book of Thot, it would not have been resorted to by the Chaldeans, Arabians and Greeks, in their philosophy. All that this science teaches us, then, if properly studied, is to read human events as the great Author of all has written them on the tablets of the universe—in short, to draw nearer to ourselves, and to remember, though infinitely inferior, because material, that we are subject to the eternal *principle* of the Deity, *in whose image we were created*, and therefore is there nothing profane in our seeking an intimacy with the immutable truths by which we are ever surrounded—or invoking, in our dark wanderings, with an humble yet sublime devotion, a knowledge of the miracles of nature, which always prove the Creator in the creature, and shew God *in everything*; for this book,” continued he, placing his hand on the glittering tome, “it contains no mysteries but for the ignorant.

“With the Egyptians, everything was typical; and in constructing a book that should be emblematic of the universe, they naturally had recourse to different signs to express different things, and they generally conveyed their meaning at once, in the most vivid, pure, and intellectual manner.

“ This explanation may appear irrelevant to you ; but I have given it to you merely to prove that whatever secrets of futurity I may be acquainted with, I have only come into possession of them by natural means. I see you still marvel at my knowledge of your birth and name—but that, too, I will account for. Young man, you behold before you one not entirely unknown to fame—at least, if the name of Giovanni Antonio Magini being in the mouths of most men be any proof of it.”

Bonaventuri rose, and, as he bowed to Magini, an involuntary flush suffused his cheek, as he remembered how the distinguished personage, in whose presence he now so unaccountably found himself, had, some two years before, played a prominent part in the vague dreams of aggrandizement he had indulged in at Florence.

“ Your name, indeed, Signor, has long been the loudest note on the trumpet of fame ; for which reason, knowing the high repute you enjoy at the Dogal court, as at all others, I marvel you should have thought it necessary to employ so much secrecy in the interview you have done me the honour of according me.”

“ For that very reason,” replied Magini, “ I have no wish to scatter such precious favours like chaff before the wind, or incur the not

equally amiable ones of the Inquisition as a dabbler in demonology. But we lose time ; and the matters I have to disclose will convince you that secrecy is quite as indispensable for *you* as for me.

“ I promised I would tell you how I became acquainted with your name and birth. From very early youth I have been devoted to the two sciences of astronomy and astrology ; in the former I hope I have discovered a few lights to my fellow creatures ; the latter I have merely pursued for my own gratification, as it is utterly impossible for any human wisdom or precaution to turn aside or alter those events which the Eternal has chronicled in as much of the arcana of nature as influences the fate of each human being ; therefore is it perhaps worse than useless to obtain a foreknowledge of them. But I was consumed with the desire of pushing this science to its uttermost limits, and so resolved to watch the *exact moment* of several individuals’ births, and cast their horoscope at the *time* ; and should I find anything remarkable in it, closely to watch their fortunes through life to test the truth of my researches. The only opportunities I had of pursuing this plan was among the poor ; and I had already cast the horoscopes of several of their children, which finding one unbroken web of ordinary events

and mediocre circumstances, I set aside as unfit for my purpose ; when, being about twenty-one years ago at Florence, I was overtaken by one of those sudden and, for the time being, terrific thunder storms so frequent in that city. I entered a small sculptor's shop nearly opposite the Ponte Della Grazie, belonging to one Giovanni Bonaventuri, who received me hospitably, and proffered the shelter I required. I looked round to select some trifling purchase in return for his civility ; and while I was so employed, an ancient crone appeared at the foot of a flight of narrow stairs, and informed mine host that he had that moment become the father of a fine boy—that the child was as thriving as the last year's vintage ; but that the poor mother was alive, and that was all."

" My poor mother ! I never saw her !" said Pietro, whose awakening interest was becoming painfully intense.

" No," continued Magini ; " for she died while I yet remained in your father's shop. He was so distressed at these tidings of his wife, that he would have been quite unaware of the two gold pistoles I slipped into his hand had not the old woman been profuse in her invocations to all the saints in the calendar to pay me suitable interest for my generosity. And no sooner had your father hurried up stairs to

make your acquaintance, and take leave of your mother, than I ascertained from the old woman the exact moment of your entry into the world, which I noted down, it being exactly at three minutes past ten in the forenoon, on the eighteenth day of May, Anno Domino 1539. And no sooner had the storm subsided than I returned home, and shut myself up for the rest of the day, which I devoted to the casting of your horoscope. I therein read no ordinary train of events; a wonderful comparative advancement in your fortunes appeared, and the aggrandizement of another person who should first incur debasement through you. I therefore resolved to watch your fortunes closely from their dawn, which I dated from the time of your entry into the Palazzo Medici, through the interest and friendship of your first patron, Vasari. I then made further calculations, which shewed me that *there* would be your great sphere of action; but still more that of the person with whose destiny yours was linked. I gained constant access to you by assuming the garb and name of Padre Martino, whom Cardinal Passerini, equally deceived with yourself as to my identity, employed to confirm your religious principles, and bend your inclinations towards the church. This, from your vague but ambitious aspirations, of which I was the repository, I knew to be

hopeless ; and, as you may remember, I eventually rather encouraged than reproved your wish to quit Florence. You had no sooner arrived in Venice than I took up my abode here also, and, unknown to you, watched you as closely as I did in Tuscany. I soon discovered your love for Bianca Cappello !——”

Bonaventuri started, and was about to speak ; but Magini made a motion with his hand, as he added——“ Do not interrupt me, for the time is brief. It was an easy matter to ascertain the exact time of the birth of a daughter of St. Mark’s ; and in her horoscope I read that her fate was the twin of yours, but with a brighter issue.”

“ How can that be ?” said the Florentine, whose curiosity had now become irrepressible ; “ for if we have indeed twin fates, must not the issue be the same ?”

“ Not exactly,” replied Magini ; “ for man is seldom true to himself ; then how can he expect that others should be so to him ? But your peril will not come from what you desert, but from what you seek. Men generally suffer—and it is meet they should—more from their vices than their victims do. God’s vengeance is sure, but the means uncertain. But seek not to know more than I choose to reveal, for it will be useless.”

“One only knowledge will I seek,” said Bonaventuri; “tell me, by your art, when and how I shall die.”

“It is a foolish knowledge, that will avail thee nought.”

“Still, it is one that I crave above all others; for the love I seek contains perils enough to furnish a thousand deaths.”

“Well, if thou wilt, be it so,” said Magini, rising, and placing a large mirror on the table, and before it two large silver tripods or incense-burners, pouring a powder into one, and a liquid into the other; and lighting both—which produced at once a lambent flame and a dense vapour—“Look,” said he, as the smoke died away, “into this mirror, and tell me what thou beholdest.”

“I see,” said Bonaventuri, “two broken arches of a small bridge, on one side a strongly fortified gate, and a dark sort of whirlpool of water rushing rapidly beneath it.”

“Dost see nothing else?”

“Nothing.”

“Look again,” said Magini.

“I see a man dressed in my clothes—no doubt myself,”—said Bonaventuri, with an unfaltering voice and unblanched cheek, “pushed over the bridge by three bravos. He struggles with the waters—now he stems them—now he

nears the shore—no, no, he sinks—he has sunk—I see him no more! Well, I glean from this,” added he, calmly, “that I shall perish in my escape from Venice, but that *she* will be saved—thank God for that.”

“Not so,” replied Magini, “your escape from Venice will be complete and perfect. But look again—what see you now?”

“Nothing but the dark waters, which have done their work, and are still,” said Bonaventuri.

“Look upwards,” said Magini; “what see you now?”

“The stars shape themselves into figures, and mark the year 1570!” exclaimed Bonaventuri. “Well, that is ten years off; and ten years of life are worth having, if *one lives them*. And that I am determined to do; for when one knows one’s life is to be a short one, one were worse than a fool not to make it a merry one! But, touching my—*our*—escape from Venice, you say that shall be complete, without pursuit or peril?”

“I said not the latter,” replied Magini, “for the pursuit will be hot, and the peril great. But I did say that thy escape would be completed—that is, shouldst thou implicitly follow my instructions; and this was the pith and marrow of the motive which induced me to seek this interview with thee. I will not hide from thee

that a price will be set upon thy head—that the daggers of innumerable assassins will be pointed at thee ; but they will not be as successful as those of Cosimo de Medici were against the unfortunate Lorenzino, in this city. In addition to the affront the nobles and republic of Venice will conceive that you have put upon them, in carrying off a daughter of San Marco, you may be sure the Grimani will leave nothing undone to stir the senate to still greater ire and deadlier vengeance, through the influence of Elena, Cappello's wife ; and, upon carefully consulting the planets, I see but *one* day and *hour* in which you can, with *safety*, accomplish your flight ; and, I much fear me, the impatience of young blood will mar all, for that is ten months off—as, to succeed, you must not attempt it before the first hour of the morning of the thirteenth of December ! And now, having put you in the way of effectually braving and baffling the republic, the nobles, and the Inquisition, you will not wonder that I sought the most profound secrecy, and solemnly enjoin it to you. We must not meet again *here* ; indeed, there will be no use in your seeking me, for you will not find me ; but your interests shall be cared for. And now, let me again impress upon you that failure and ruin *must* be the result of your

attempting to leave Venice before the day and hour I have indicated to you. *On that day*, though much peril will accrue to *others, you*, and all you care for, will be safe. I will even tell you more, which is, that you will have the greater difficulty in patiently abiding this propitious time, as I see some shining light is about to be extinguished, which will render your meetings with Cappello's daughter less frequent, and more difficult; but *remember, one hour sooner, and you fail!*"

So saying, Magini took the lamp, and, silently beckoning to Bonaventuri to follow him, reconducted him down the same narrow, winding staircase they had come up by. Neither of them spoke till they reached the high-vaulted narrow hall, when Magini being about to unbar the door, Bonaventuri arrested his hand, saying—

"Great Sir, for what you *have* vouchsafed to disclose to me, I thank you heartily; but, in case of need, is there no glimmer by which I may find you—no clue by which I can discover where you may have pitched your tent, between this and December?"

"*Astra castra, numen lumen!*" was Magini's only reply, as he opened the door, and, pushing Bonaventuri outwards, closed and barred it, before the latter had time to turn round.

Day was faintly dawning, as the young Florentine regained his gondola; and so rapt was he in the contemplation of the strangeness of his night's adventure, that he actually passed Bianca's window, without the usual ceremony of sending sundry despatches of sighs and kisses, by that treacherous courier, the air, which never conveyed them to their destination, but dispersed them, over the Adriatic, where, as it may be supposed, they were never heard of more.

CHAPTER VII.

"The line which separates regard from love is so fine, that the young heart transgresses the boundary before it is aware of even having verged upon it."—W. H. HARRISON.

"Must the Lethean wave my memory cover,
As if indeed it were a worthless thing;
And all the bright hopes of my youth be over,
Blighted like roses in their earliest spring?"

JAMES KNOX.

FIVE months had rolled rapidly on, at least for Bianca and Bonaventuri, who had contrived at all hazards to meet alone once in the four and twenty hours. Her portrait had remained neglected and unfinished on the easel, as Titian had been occupied in finishing several other pictures. And even Arianna's pale cheeks (paler, occasioned by the daily increasing persecutions of Vittorio and her father) had escaped the hitherto vigilant eye of her affectionate mistress and friend, so engrossed had the latter

been by her all-absorbing love for Pietro. It was a lovely morning in June when Bianca entered her own sunny apartment in the Palazzo Cappello, and found Arianna affecting to assist Ghiribizzo, the dwarf, in arranging his young mistress's portrait on the easel, as she had promised to give Titian another sitting after her siesta on that day; but though apparently busy in her vocation, Arianna was in reality crying, and doing little else than applying her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Crying again, my pet dove!" said Bianca, kindly, "why really, if seeing thy father is always to have the effect of dissolving thee into a fountain, he may seek another daughter, for he shall not play off his juggling on my Arianna. Or has Vittorio been forcing his unwelcome love? Ghiribizzo, thou mayst go."

"I know I may," said the dwarf, coolly folding his arms, and looking from Bianca to Arianna, "but if every one did what they *might* do, *some people* would be kissing instead of crying; and there's no disputing taste, certainly, but for my part I should think the former the pleasanter diversion of the two."

"Begone, I say, Master Malapert," repeated Bianca.

"Dost not find *the night air apt* to make the voice hoarse, lady?" said the immovable

dwarf, "for it strikes me, thy voice is not so musical to-day, or it may be that the words which form the burden of thy song affect me not. 'Begone! begone!' they have an ugly twang with them; and then, 'Master Malapert' is a person with whom I have no acquaintance, and therefore I don't care to leave the room in his company."

"Vanish, thou imp!" cried Bianca, stamping her pretty little foot, and with difficulty repressing a smile; "what keeps thee when I say go?"

"I am only staying out of curiosity," said Ghiribizzo,—“to see what a little thing can anger a great lady.” And then, mimicking the French Ambassador's voice, gait, and gestures, and first gathering all his fingers to a point, and then opening them wide after he had kissed them, to let the kisses fly, as he expressed it, he said, in the most mincing voice and bad French accent, with divers curious contortions of feature and of limb, still kissing his hand to Bianca—“*Addio, Bellissima! carissima specchio dell' anima mia*—Looking-glass of my soul, adieu!”

Even Arianna smiled through her tears at the dwarf's perfect but ludicrous imitation of the ambassador, which the former perceiving, changed his tone, and suddenly expanding his chest, throwing his head haughtily over his left shoulder, and knitting his brows like Vit-

torio Cappello, he said, with a profound bow, and a slow, measured voice—"So you *have* smiles, signorina, when you choose to bestow them; 'tis pity that anything so brilliant should be like a northern sun—only partially and rarely seen." So saying, Ghiribizzo strutted out of the room.

"'Tis a merry sprite, after all," said Bianca; "especially when he puts on my wimple, spreads a fan, and puckers his face into a fac-simile of my illustrious stepmother's as she solemnly proceeds to vespers. But to return to thy red eyes, child. Vittorio is a dolt not to see that thou hatest him."

"*I* hate him!" exclaimed Arianna, involuntarily, as her neck, cheeks, and even her fair forehead, with an eloquent flush, denied the accusation.

"Now, by the mass, thou dost puzzle me!" said Bianca, intently reading her face, from which the blood was receding as rapidly as it had come. "Answer me roundly, *dost* thou hate him?—yea, or nay?"

"I could not hate anything belonging to you, signora," stammered Arianna.

"Ah, that is all very pretty, as far as I am concerned," replied Bianca; "but it is plain thou hatest him; for who could shun or frown on what they love?"

“ And what chance could I have in loving him? I could not love him honestly, and I would not love him otherwise.”

“ Hear how she talks! Thinkest thou that love is a matter of could and would—a thing to be doffed and donned at will, like a garment, that is suitable for one season and not for another? ’Tis plain thou knowest nothing about it!”

“ But if duty compels, Lady?”

“ I tell thee, Love is a tyrant, and acknowledges no allegiance but to himself.”

“ That may be,” sighed Arianna, “ when fates are equal.”

“ Love, like death, makes us all so!”

“ It may be so; but——”

“ But, thou art a good girl!—I know it, Arianna; and if I cannot be as good, I can at least admire thy goodness.”

“ Would that I deserved your praise,” said Arianna, rising hastily from her seat; and suddenly recollecting that her mistress’s mandolin wanted tuning, she broke three of the strings, and then devoted all her attention to replacing them by three others, which kept her face so closely bent downwards towards the instrument that it was impossible to see aught that was passing there. Nor had Bianca time, had she been inclined to scrutinize it; for suddenly a

beautiful magnolia tree, whose delicate white chalices waved to and fro outside the window, became more agitated than any ordinary current of air could have been the cause of; and Bianca thought she beheld more white nestled in a projecting bough than belonged to its own blossoms. Nor was she mistaken; for upon a closer inspection, she found it to be a ball of paper, or, in other words, a letter from Bonaventuri, who converted the very trees into Mercuries, when he could find no other. She stretched out her hand, and with very little effort secured it. Having hastily concealed it in her bosom, she walked from the window; and turning to Arianna, said in a tone of studied carelessness, " Well, czarina, I must leave you now, having a round of dull visits to make with my father's worse half. But I shall be back in time for my sitting; so don't let the emperor of canvas tear his cap, break his brushes, or commit any other extravagance, as he did once before when I kept him waiting; but discourse him of his art, or of his daughter, which is his nature, for never saw I any two beings so alike in all things; and if that does not do, shew him my sapphire velvet robe, with its diamond loopings, that I mean to wear at the *festa d'acqua*, given by the admiral of the fleet to-night. And ask him if he does not think the

pearl-work on the sleeves daintily embroidered ; in short, let not his humour flag till I appear, for he is, as we know, wont to vent it, not on the painting of his pictures,—for *that is his* part of the story,—but on the features of his sitters. And I have no fancy that strange and yet unborn eyes, as they gaze on these walls some centuries hence, should respond to the veracious ciceroni's '*questa è la bella Bianca Cappello !*' as he points to my portrait. '*Bella !*' not much of that—ha, ha, ha ! So see, dearest, that he enters into no plot with Time to libel me to that cavilling critic, posterity." And so saying, the beautiful Venetian left the room, and Arianna was alone.

" And so she thinks I hate him," soliloquized the young girl aloud ; " then I must have played my part better than I thought. Would it had more in it than the seeming. *Why do I love him ?*—tush ! Why am I the jeweller's daughter, and he the noble's son ? Yet what is it I love ? Is it his hot temper ?—his haughty spirit ?—his lax morality ?—and his thousand faults ? No, no, no ; for I am ever busy judging them. I *hate* his faults ; but still—still—I cannot, though *I do pray for it*, hate him ! Have I not armed myself against him with indignant memories of all the insults he hath offered to my better nature, in his proud, im-

perious, and unhallowed love, whose rude breath would steal away the bloom of maiden purity. In this hath he outraged me, and this have I with look and speech resented. But what may they avail, while my heart, like a grovelling slave, still kneels to him for further buffets !”

Voices were heard in the gallery ; and Arianna, fearing her agitation might be perceived, struck the chords of the mandolin she had been tuning, and in a very sweet but somewhat tremulous voice, sang the following song, which was nothing more than an improvised continuation of her own feelings :—

I may not love thee, for thou art
Far as yon star above me ;
I dare not hope—for oh ! thy heart
Unhallowedly doth love me.

I ne’er had loved thee, could *my will*
Have driven thee from my thought ;
Or hush’d my heart from whisp’ring still
The language thou hast taught.

’Tis not *my* fault, if earth, air, sky,
All speak to me of thee !
But ’tis *my* fault, if thou descry
One glimpse of love in me :

For though I cannot quench the fire
Which burns existence out,
I yet may seem, like Hecla’s spire,
Unmelting ice without !

The last notes of Arianna's song had scarcely died away, before the massive velvet curtain that hung before one of the doors was pushed aside by a very white and handsome, but manly hand, which appeared at the end of a rich point ruffle, and gorgeously embroidered green velvet sleeve. In another moment Vittorio Cappello was in the room, and shutting the door and closing the curtain, he advanced and seated himself beside Arianna, who made an effort to rise and leave the couch for a chair, but was prevented by the strong grasp of Vittorio's hand round her waist. "Nay, cigna mia—my swan," said he; "there is room enough for us both, and I like the air of thy song marvellously; but the last stanza, which is all I heard, is worthy of excommunication!—Why shouldst thou

———— ' *seem, like Hecla's spire,
Unmelting ice without?*

when thou ownest that thou canst not quench the fire that burns within. Pr'ythee, change thy note, and there will be more harmony between us."

"Surely, signor," replied Arianna, still struggling to release her hand—"I am not answerable for the silly wording of every stray madrigal."

"No! why, I could have sworn 'twas thine own offspring, 'tis so like thee. Whose is it, then?"

“ I don’t know,” blushed the young girl, ashamed of the falsehood she was uttering—“ I think I heard the *Sieur Colbert*, the French Ambassador’s secretary, sing it; and believe it was composed by *la Belle Ferronnière*, of the sixteenth century.”

“ Ay, but *la Belle Ferronnière* was too sensible a woman to act upon such an absurd theory; and though not exactly a monarch,” added *Vittorio*, complacently eyeing his handsome person in an opposite mirror, “ I am not afraid to measure chances with *Francis the First*.”

“ Poor prince—Heaven rest his soul !” said *Arianna*.

“ Amen,” laughed *Cappello*; but I did not mean in his present quarters; for I have no wish to taste the joys of heaven just yet—an earthly paradise is all I seek !” And flinging his arm round *Arianna*’s waist, he endeavoured to draw her rudely towards him. Before, however, he could succeed in so doing, she had taken a bodkin from her hair, and, apparently by accident, so severely wounded his hand, that from very pain he was compelled to relinquish his grasp.

“ Out upon thee for an impregnable citadel ! One would think thou hadst been fortified by *Buonarotti*, as there is little else of the angelo

about thee," said Vittorio, holding the back of his wounded hand to his mouth.

"Ho! ho! generalissimo—then if so, you should have been wiser than to take up arms against her," said a voice, which, upon looking up, Cappello found to proceed from Ghiribizzo, who was balancing himself lazily to and fro on a branch of the magnolia tree, from whence he had a perfect view of all that passed within the room.

"Now, by St. Anthony!" cried Vittorio, drawing his rapier, and rushing to the window—"I'll make a magpie of thee in good earnest; and when I have slit thy tongue to the extent of my liking, thou mayst chatter away to thy fellow daws for the rest of thy life."

"Not in their present quarters; for I have no wish to taste the joys of heaven just yet—an earthly paradise is all I seek!" So, you see, signor, our tastes agree," said the dwarf, running down the tree with the nimbleness of a cat, and escaping into Salviati's house through the garden gate.

"Now, hailstones quench thee for a will-o'-the-wisp!" said the latter, closing the window, fastening it, and drawing down the blind; "but thou shalt do thy spiriting elsewhere soon!" And so saying, he turned round just in time to perceive Arianna leaving the room. Springing

forward, he caught her dress, exclaiming —
 “Come, come, devils and angels to escape me both is a little too bad. Have you no touch of humanity in you,” continued he, holding up his still bleeding hand, “to leave me here to die of my wounds alone?”

“I am indeed sorry, signor, that my awkwardness should have occasioned you so ill an accident, and with your permission I will send Catterina to look to it, as she is better skilled in the secrets of chirurgery than I am,” said Arianna, making another effort to leave the room.

“Yes, with my permission, but not without,” rejoined Cappello, forcibly detaining her. “I were wanting in respect to the republic, when one of her nobles aileth, did I not enforce his right to choose his own leech,” laughed he.

“Certainly,” replied his companion, eschewing the jest, and affecting to take his words literally, “whom would your lordship have called?”

“Just the busiest knave in all Venice, Signor Nissuno,* and no other; but I am determined that the hand that wounded mine shall heal it!”

“I must at least seek something to bandage it with,” said Arianna, again attempting to leave the room.

* Nobody.

“ You have not far to seek,” rejoined Cappello, pointing to a work-table.

As there was no other excuse feasible, Arianna walked to the table, and taking a piece of the linen to which Vittorio had pointed, she commenced bandaging his hand, which was no sooner done than he found some pretext for having it undone, and begun over again. But the sight of the blood, mingled with a feeling of regret at having occasioned him so much pain, produced a revulsion of feeling that occasioned a sudden faintness. Cappello, perceiving it, threw his arm round her waist to prevent her falling.

“ Arianna! dearest Arianna !” said he, all his better feelings for the moment gaining a mastery over his habitual selfishness, “y ou are ill, and I am the cause of it—only forgive me, and never again will I——”

“ No, no,” interrupted Arianna, struggling in vain to free herself from Vittorio’s embrace, “ I am bet——” but before she could finish the sentence, her head fell perfectly insensible upon his shoulder. How mysterious are the ebbs and flows of the heart, that diversify the dream of human life as it glides away between earth and heaven ! It is difficult to believe that the tempestuous and stormy waves of passion of one moment, have their origin from the same source

as the calm and equal flow of the gentler feelings of the next. Cappello was ambitious in the widest extent of the word, and it is the nature of ambition to make men jugglers—deceiving all, even themselves, with the semblance of things that are not. He was reckless of all that did not directly or indirectly redound to his own gratification or aggrandizement ; his feeling for Arianna, generally speaking, was one of intense and unprincipled selfishness. But now, as she hung unconsciously about his neck, in the still semblance of death, the memories of their childhood rushed back upon him with such velocity, that for the time being they swept away the iron barriers of after years, and at *that moment* he truly loved her!—and had it been to be done on the *instant*, would willingly have sacrificed *all for her*.

“ Arianna ! my Arianna ! for mine you shall be, honourably, honestly, if you will only open your eyes,” exclaimed Vittorio, as he laid her gently on the couch, and parted the bright hair on her pale cold forehead,—but she continued fearfully still, save that

“ A living whisper—a perpetual breath,
Almost a sigh, did on her lips remain ;
As if ’twould rather linger in such death,
Than fly to life, where louder breathings reign.”

“ Arianna ! speak to me—frown on me, chide

me, spurn me, if thou wilt, but only look on me, on thy *little Vittorio*, thy brother, thy play-fellow, as *I used* to be. I would not waste my breath in words when I could kiss thee into life, but that 'twere mean to rob thee when thou canst make no defence. Tush!" continued he, looking with abstract admiration on the beautiful being before him—"What is the world?—the scarecrow of grown children, the altar of fools, the paradise of knaves, and the contempt of the good! And yet, had I but a throne to place thee on, it would puzzle that said world to know whether it had been made for thee, or thou for it, so fitting would each be to the other! When I look at the porcelain clay of which thou art moulded, my eyes tell me that fate bespoke thee for a queen, and that that work-a-day knave, Ferrai, hath no more to do with thy parentage than with that of the other gems which are called his, until he finds the prince that hangs them round some noble neck."

Symptoms of animation at last returned; and—as in all cases of temporary suspension of existence, the subject that dwelt last in the mind is sure to return to it the first—a vague terror at seeing Vittorio bending over her, caused Arianna to exert herself to the uttermost to collect her scattered senses. With good feeling, upon

perceiving the first glimpse of returning reason, Cappello released her hand, and withdrew to the further end of the sofa.

“Dearest Arianna!” said he, kneeling, though still at a distance, “fear nothing; if I cannot cease to love you, I will at least change the fashion of my love, and love you in a way that you can neither resent nor reject.”

As the young girl turned her languid eyes on Vittorio’s beautiful and eloquent face, where his very soul seemed coined into looks, she found it more difficult than ever to act up to the resolution she had adopted; and vainly attempting to speak, ended by bursting into tears.

“Away with tears!” said Vittorio, advancing, and taking her hand; “they are for the vanquished, and you are the victor, Arianna; then why weep—is it so sad a lot *to be the wife of Vittorio Cappello?*”

“*Your* wife!” echoed Arianna, raising her eyes to his, and for an instant, but an instant only, plunging into the luxury of the thought, and the next rising above it, as she added calmly and firmly, “Oh, signor, why mock me with an impossibility!”

“Who says ’tis impossible, *if I will it?*” said Vittorio, with all his wonted hauteur. “Knowest thou not that Cæsar swam the river

where meaner mortals would have stayed to build a bridge ?”

“ It were but a song masque,” replied Arianna, almost proudly, “ for the first noble in Venice to cater for the people’s mirth by his marriage with a goldsmith’s daughter !”

“ How long was Venice without a gold currency, pray, till old Dandolo thought fit to stamp his image on the metal, and enrol it in the state ?* and thinkest thou that *I* cannot stamp sufficient nobility on thy father’s daughter to make her current among the best of them, and save her from the ‘ *people’s mirth* ?’ ”

“ It might be so,” said Arianna, coldly, “ could you ever get the higher powers to consent to it ; but there lieth the insurmountable obstacle.”

“ Higher powers !” repeated Vittorio, biting his lip, and then suddenly exchanging his look of scorn for a smile ; “ well, if it must be so, I will be the emperor, and forthwith do grant my

* It was in the reign of John Dandolo, in 1285, that gold zechinis (or sequins) were first struck in Venice. But before they could be issued, the Doge was obliged to ask the permission of the Emperor and Pope. These sequins bore the name and image of the Doge, at first seated on the dogal throne ; but afterwards he was represented standing ; and finally, in the latter times of the Republic, on his knees, receiving from the hands of St. Mark the standard of the Republic.

imperial assent, whilst thou shalt play the higher power of pope, and I will kiss thy foot, and take thy consent on the instant." And here Cappello knelt to suit the action to the word, by taking one of Arianna's fairy feet in his hand, which he raised to his lips.

"Nay, signor," said she, while the rosy shadow of her young blood flitted in hasty blushes over her face and neck, "this trifling may be a morning's pastime to you, but it will be a life's misery to me."

"'Sdeath!" exclaimed Vittorio, rising hastily, and seating himself beside her, "I have learned fencing from Frescobaldi* to little purpose, if I can be defeated by the endless parryings of a girl! Leave riddles, and answer me in plain Venetian—Dost thou love me, or dost thou hate me?"

"To love you, signor," stammered Arianna, "is a presumption that I could never be guilty of; and hatred is a deadly sin, from which Heaven keep me."

"I want no sophistry, but a plain yea or nay—wilt answer me?"

"You are not my confessor, signor; and for answering, I cannot do so more plainly than I have done."

* A fencing-master of high repute at Padua.

“ Now, by St. Mark, thy provocation doth outstrip my patience !” cried Cappello, mechanically plunging his hand within his bosom, and grasping his dagger ; “ and since my love affects thee not, and ’tis clear thou hatest me, we’ll see which is the better hater of the two. And thou hast only to look back on the history of the world to know that hatred hath ever compassed greater achievements than love.” So saying, he walked haughtily to the door, whither Arianna’s eyes followed him with an expression certainly very far removed from the hatred of which he had accused her. He stood for a moment before the curtain, without raising it, with all the irresolution that conflicting passions ever occasion. Anger spurred him forward—love drew him back ; and as he turned his eyes, and met those of Arianna, which were immediately turned away in the deepest confusion at having been so encountered, his love triumphed, and he returned.

“ Now, for my life,” said he, in his gentlest voice, as he took her hand,—“ I cannot think thy words deal fairly with thy heart. Let thine eyes answer me, dearest, for they *will not* belie thee, like thy words !”

“ If they say aught but what my words have said,” replied Arianna, still turning her head away, “ they are false indeed.”

“Then do you mean to say,” rejoined Vittorio, “that it is your *real wish* that all should be at an end between us?”

“It *is*!” said Arianna, with desperate firmness,—“at least,” she added, in a lower voice, “it is my resolution—my duty, and that is the same thing.”

But Vittorio heard her not; for she had no sooner uttered the words “*it is*,” than he broke from her, and left the room.

“Your pardon, signor,” said a page, who met him at the end of the gallery; “but a messenger waits below from Pierio Bolzanio to say he lieth dangerously ill—even to the death, the messenger thinks,—and the old man would speak with your lordship, if speech be not past him ere you arrive.”

“Bid them double man the gondola, and I will be with him on the instant,” said Cappello, as he followed the page down stairs.

For a full hour Arianna remained abstractedly gazing upon the vacancy Vittorio had left.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ — Ce monde, où les mêmes passions, les mêmes vices, les mêmes ridicules, malgré quelques changements passagers de costumes, d'usages, de modes et de mœurs, donnent à la génération présente une grande ressemblance avec celles qui la précèdent ou celles qui la suivent.”—DELILLE.

“ Then come for a sorbet, my love;
Or anything else that you see ;
But unless you come quickly, my dove,
I shall certainly faint with ennui.”

JOHN FRANCIS.

“ MAY my name be unknown a century hence,” said Titian, (who had remained working at Bianca's portrait, in order to see her dressed for the aquatic fête given that evening by the admiral of the fleet,) “ if the Signor Ammiraglio will want one of the myriads of sparkling lamps and blazing fireworks he has commanded ; for by the soul of Appelles, signorina, you will out-shine them all !”

“ Hush !” said Bianca, with a suppressed

laugh, as a stately rustling announced the approach of her stepmother, and the voice of her father was heard exclaiming—"Throw wide the doors to let the Contessa Elena pass!" In another moment two pages had raised the velvet curtain, and the Signora Elena sailed into the room after the same portly fashion that a man-of-war sails into port, while she towed after her, her more humble-minded and humble-looking sposo, whose thin, small figure was cased in a perfect armour of gold embroidery, on a ground of granite velvet; while his red forked beard, which had gained him the *soubriquet* through Venice of *Barbarossa*, met his snow-white ruff, from under which appeared the insignia in brilliants of the order of St. Catherine, which had descended from father to son, in the Cappello family, ever since the year 1063, when it was first instituted in Palestine, and bestowed upon their ancestor, Ugo Cappello, in the Holy Land. Signor Bartolommeo's trunk hose seemed "a world too wide" for his shrunk limbs, and the extreme height of his red-heeled shoes almost caused his steps to totter as he paced across the marble floor. Titian, Bianca, and the dwarf, ranged themselves in a straight line to receive, with due respect, the lord and lady of the mansion. Unmeasured and unblushing flattery to his ancient and unattractive spouse was the

tenure upon which Count Bartolommeo Cappello held his domestic quiet and conjugal felicity; and the less provocation the lady's appearance gave to compliments, the more fertile was his imagination in framing them, and the more indefatigable zeal did his tongue evince in uttering them. On the present occasion the insults the Signora Elena's person had received from nature were considerably aggravated by the satires of a very splendid and youthful style of dress, which left no defect unexposed, and therefore taxed her liege lord's invention to the uttermost; but spurred on by the desperation of the case, he addressed himself to the artist, and plunged at once into the following rhapsody:—

“Now, by the judgment of Paris, Signor Titian, you are fortunate! The rumour runs that you are painting a Venus, and *here* you have a model ready to your hand! Turn thee, my dove, to give our skilful friend the full benefit of all your circling graces!” and the Signora Elena, as she resigned her skinny hand to the care of her gallant husband, puckered up her mouth, elevated her chin, and turned slowly round.

“Nay, Bianca herself,” said Cappello, with a genuine burst of parental pride, as he turned his eyes upon his daughter, more radiant in her youthful loveliness than even in the dazzling

splendour of her dress—"Bianca might have given thee valuable assistance in the creation of a Venus! By the blood of my fathers! daughter mine, but I shall think Fate has cheated me at the long odds, if thou dost not die a queen: for never saw I a brow so circled for a diadem—but one," added he, with a grotesque leer, gently tapping his ancient bride under the chin, as he perceived the storm that was darkening on her brow, at his unusual admiration of his daughter.

"Is not the Signor Vittorio of your company?" said Titian, with the charitable intention of extricating the Signor Bartolommeo from the dilemma the unusual veracity of his speech had brought him into.

"Doubtless," replied the latter; "but it is a villanous habit of the youth of the present day always to keep their seniors waiting for them. Rapiers and thumb-screws! what would my father have said had I kept *him* waiting half an instant! Go, sirrah!" said the Count, addressing the dwarf, "and let the Signor Vittorio know, that the *Contessa* awaits him! Bless me! we really can wait no longer. It is out of all rule to be late when royalty is in question; and the festa is given in honour of the Archduchess Joan of Austria."

“What, signor! the princess who is to marry Francesco de Medici, Cosimo Primo’s son?”

“The same,” replied the Count; “the marriage is not to take place for two years, and in the meanwhile she is making the tour of the Italian states; but it seems to me that Cosimo is still so hale that she will have to wait some time ere she be Grand Duchess of Tuscany.”

“My private letters colour the matter otherwise,” said Titian. “They say he is utterly weary of the trammels of government; and rumours have already stirred the leaves of the Boboli that he means to resign the reins into the hands of his son; and what is stranger still, from being the most ambitious of princes, he seems to have changed into a mere artisan, as they say he is indefatigable in the construction of a curious and cunning workmanship of coloured stones, which he has himself invented.”*

“There is no denying,” said the Count, that no family ever did so much for the arts as the Medici; and was their art of governing

* This was the beautiful fabric of *Pietra dura* at Florence, which is exclusively royal property: it was invented by Cosimo Primo, who was himself an expert workman in this beautiful art. It is interesting to see the perfection it has reached since its infant dawns in the sixteenth century.

equally creditable to them, they would be irreproachable."

"Alas, signor!" replied the artist, as he collected his brushes preparatory to his departure, "that is a wide word to say of any man, much less of any family."

"True, true, my good friend! But by St. Vitus!—the only saint I ever heard of who was given to dancing—the sea already echoes with a wondrous noise of flutes, fiddles, and *viol de gambas*, and we shall be marvellously late. How now, sirrah," continued the Count, turning to the dwarf, as he entered the room, "thou art not worth thy motley to tarry so long on so brief an errand."

"Please you, illustrissimo, I had to seek the Signor Vittorio's servant, and he told me the young Count is still detained by the bed-side of the worthy Signor Bolzanio. Heaven grant," added Ghiribizzo, dashing a tear from the corner of his eye, "that the poor gentleman does not take a trip to the church-yard, to improve himself in the dead languages."

"Heaven grant it, indeed!" echoed Bianca, with a deep sigh, for she not only had a sincere affection for her kind old master, but the thought of where she could so constantly meet Bonaventuri, in the event of Bolzanio's death, also flashed across her, with that electric and selfish alchemy

of love which ever transmutes all past, present, and future events into a reference to *one object*. " Might we not," asked Bianca, timidly, still resolving the same theme—" might we not call at Bolzanio's door ere we go on board the admiral's ship, and learn a true account of him ?"

" Impossible !" replied her father, " for we are already so late that we shall scarcely have time to reach the vessel ere the cannon of the arsenal give notice of the arrival of the Archduchess Joan."

So saying, the Count Bartolommeo extended his hand to his wife, who placed her own within it, with all due dignity, Ghiribizzo closely imitating all their movements behind his young mistress, who abstractedly availed herself of Titian's proffered assistance, not uttering a syllable till the "*buona sera*" she bestowed upon him as the gondola pushed off.

It is impossible to imagine a more fairy-like scene than the Adriatic presented on that night. Beside the Venetian fleet, which displayed silken pennants and gilded prows for the occasion, were innumerable Turkish felucas, with their large gilt lanterns, green pennants, and glittering crescents. There was also a goodly display of less showy but more formidable looking English man-of-war, many of which afterwards went round the world with Sir Francis Drake in the

expedition of 1577, displaying no other ornament than that which then, as now, they had such just cause to be proud of—their national flag—which, for a thousand years, had not only braved, but conquered,

“The battle and the breeze.”

Next to some rude, square-built Norwegian vessels, with plain sails, as hoary as their own ice-bound seas, were numerous clumsily ornamented three-decked Spanish galleons, with either some grim-looking hidalgo or equally grim San Antonio for a figure head; but with all, they formed no bad background, as it were, to the gorgeous small craft of gondolas, and their light and elegant monarch, the *Bucintoro*. The Admiral Filippo Vasi's ship actually looked like a floating meteor, or rather, like an enchanted bark of precious stones, so completely was the rigging, and even the decks outside, as far as they rose above the waters, illuminated with coloured lamps; while from the main-mast floated, in honour of the Archduchess Joan, a white flag, emblazoned with the double-necked eagle of Austria, done in black but transparent lamps, surmounted by the Austrian crown, in a brilliant imitation of jewels. Nor did the brilliancy end here, for the heavens were spangled with stars, and the fire-flies had congregated in such my-

riads, that it seemed as if the breezes were pelt-ing each other with miniature stars.

No sooner had Count Bartolommeo Cappello and his beautiful daughter reached the deck of the Admiral's ship, than he and as many of his guests as had assembled surrounded them with complimentary greetings,—all except the Marquis de Millepropos, who remembered, with a just indignation, the uncourteous return of his *billet-doux*.

Bianca, having looked in vain for the only eyes she cared for, asked the younger Vasi who that beautiful woman was upon whom Gonzo Damerino was inflicting his dulness?

"That," said Ernesto Vasi, "is a Florentine bride—the Contessa Ricci. She is very beautiful, certainly; but I have seen faces that are more beautiful," concluded the young man, with a sigh, as his thoughts reverted to Arianna.

"Oh, she is lovely!" exclaimed Bianca, still gazing intently upon the young bride, and heedless of Vasi's concluding remark. "I never saw a person I should so much wish to be like."

"Is it possible, signora," said Don Gomez de Sylva, gallantly, affecting a look of surprise, "that you have never looked in the glass?"

"Often," replied Bianca, laughing, "and without seeing anything that pleased me."

"Well," said Don Gomez, "this certainly

confirms what I have often heard, but till now, doubted—namely, that it is impossible to please some women.”

Here a loud discharge of cannon announced the arrival of the Archduchess Joan, in the *Bucintoro*, with Geronimo Priuli, the Doge, followed by the gondolas and suites of the Emperor's ambassadors, and the Patriarch of Aquilea.

The royal party had no sooner neared the Admiral's ship, than the musicians began to play a beautiful motet of Palestrina's,* which that Homer of music, as he was deservedly called, in the sixteenth century, had composed for the occasion. The Archduchess Joan was tall,

* Giovanni Pierluigi Palestrina was elected Maestro di Cappella of Santa Maria Maggiore, in 1562; of St. Peter's, in 1571; and died in 1594; being then sixty-five years old. His music is remarkable for the simplicity of its style, and the cheerful character of its melody. His works are numerous. Besides twelve books of masses, he published many motets, hymns, madrigals, magnificats, and other pieces. It is said that the Pope, being offended at the manner in which the mass had been set and performed, had resolved to banish music, in parts, from the church; but Palestrina requested him first to hear one which he would compose. The celebrated composition called, “*Missa Papæ Marcelli*,” was written, and performed at Easter, 1555, before the Pope and Cardinals, who were so delighted with the music, that it was instantly adopted in the celebration of the rites of the Romish church.

slight, and fair ; neither ugly nor handsome ; but having a decidedly Austrian face, with a rigid coldness of look and manner, which gave her the appearance of enduring everything and enjoying nothing. All the nobles having ranged themselves on the deck to receive her, she was conducted by the Doge to a throne prepared for her ; after which, the assembled guests were, in their turn, presented to her by him, commencing with the ladies ; all of whom she received courteously, but coldly, and, as it struck Cappello's daughter, she received her *more* coldly and *less* courteously than the rest. Whether this was actually the case, or not, it was one of those underminings of fancy which is quite sufficient to widen the incipient dislike that one human being often, at first sight, conceives for another, without any pre-existing cause. Nor was this embryo antipathy of Bianca's at all lessened, as she witnessed the gracious reception she gave the Signora Elena ; who, in right of her rank as the sister of the Patriarch, and wife of Cappello, was seated next the Archduchess, the Doge Priuli not being married. From the unexpressive and uninteresting face of the Archduchess, Bianca turned to encounter one which suffused her own with blushes. It was that of Bonaventuri, who had arrived in the suite

of his patron, the Ambassador. His dress—of violet velvet, richly embroidered in gold—far surpassed, in splendour and elegance, any of those present. And he had also contrived—thanks to an unsparing use of Salviati's name, and his own insinuating manners—to procure from Ferrai, and one or two Jews, such a costly display of jewels as far outshone those of most of his noble friends, splendid as they were on the occasion. If love has one incentive greater than another, it is pride; and the pride man or woman feels in the object of their affections, always enhances their love tenfold. Bianca perfectly adored Bonaventuri, as she cast her eyes round on the flower of the nobles of all nations, and saw that on *none* had nature stamped such a noble air as upon her handsome, but low born lover; and though low birth is a great stumblingblock to love in all women—even to those who are lowly born themselves—that painful truth was, for the moment, completely merged, with Bianca, in the circumstance of Pietro's superiority of appearance, which, from the murmur of admiration that ran from guest to guest, seemed to strike others as forcibly as herself. Pietro bowed to her tenderly, but respectfully,—and her father at that moment asking, who was that very handsome cavaliero of her acquaintance

that was not of his? she blushed, and stammered out—that he was a friend of Vittorio's, whom she had met at Bolzanio's school; and then turned away to speak to her young friends, the beautiful Leonora and Lucrezia D'Este. They were with their uncle, the Cardinal Ludovico D'Este, who was holding his large red cardinal's hat before his eyes, as he gazed upwards on the illumination of the vessel.

“Dear Bianca!” said the beautiful Lucrezia, “who was that very handsome cavaliero that saluted you just now?”

As she ceased speaking, a deep sigh slightly stirred the ruff on her shoulders; and slowly turning her gentle and dignified face, she beheld a pair of large and very melancholy looking dark eyes intently fixed upon her, belonging to a youth who had not seen more than sixteen summers, or thereabout.

“Nay,” whispered Bianca, with a smile, “rather let me ask you, cara mia, who that handsome youth is, standing next Paola Paruta, the historian; for truly, to judge by his intense application to your face, he has been learning you by heart.”

“Always the same, Bianca—you must have your jest; but I am sorry I cannot give you the information you want.”

“Ah, Torquato! mio amico—how fares it

with you ?” said the Cardinal Ludovico, at this moment lowering his eyes, and extending his hand to the youth whom the two ladies had been discussing.

“ I thank your eminence, well as your kindness could wish,” replied the young man, timidly.

“ That’s right—and Rinaldo,* how does he get on ?” rejoined the Cardinal, kindly.

* Alluding to Tasso’s first epic poem, which he began at sixteen, and brought out at the age of seventeen, dedicating it to his friend and patron the Cardinal Ludovico D’Este, who made him a gentleman of his court, and subsequently invited him to Ferrara, to be present at the marriage of his brother Alphonso to an archduchess of Austria, whither Tasso went in October 1565, and there it was, at the splendid fêtes given in celebration of these nuptials, that the poet’s intimacy began, and his passion increased to insanity for the beautiful Lucrezia D’Este, then Duchess of Urbino, who listened with more than complacency to the melodious verses in which her own charms appeared to derive an additional glow, as they poured from the impassioned lips of her ill-fated admirer, whose hopeless frenzy was from time to time lulled into a deceitful calm by his frequent retirements with the beautiful object of his idolatry to the lovely shades of Belriguardo, whither Lucrezia, having separated from her husband, always accompanied her brother Alphonso; and it was in all probability in this enchanting retreat, that the hopeless sighs of the lover, mingling with the dreams of the poet and the breath of that paradise of flowers, toned Tasso’s verse to those musical harmonies for which it is unrivalled. Of Leonora, his reputed love, he seems to have thought little, and written less; and it has always been clear to me, that Lucrezia, not Leonora, was the

“ Like all other ill weeds, please your eminence, he grows apace,” said the young man.

“ *Coraggio, coraggio,*” said the Cardinal, as he turned to speak to the Patriarch of Aquilea and the Pope’s nuncio, to the latter of whom he presented his young protégé, as the son of the distinguished poet, Bernardo Tasso, of Bergamo.

The Nuncio, who was no other than Cinto Aldobrandini, who befriended the poet so staunchly and delicately in after life, when, alas ! both glory and generosity came *too late*, now extended his hand to the timid boy before him, and inquired if he too were of Bergamo ? and whether he also laid claim to the bays that had so flourishingly adorned his father’s brows ?

“ *Monsignore,*” said the young Torquato, replying to Aldobrandini’s last question first, “ I fear me that geniuses, for the most part, are intellectual spendthrifts, who leave little or nothing to those who come after them.”

“ Nay, by the mass !” interrupted the cardinal, thou art an ungrateful prodigal to say so : for if I am to believe thy friends, Paruta and Scipio di Gonzaga, thy father, even now during his

object of his affections—an opinion in which I am happy to find myself fully borne out by the physician Giacomazzi, in his “ *Dialoghi Sopra gli Amori la Prigionia, ed il Genio di Torquato Tasso.*” Brescia, 1827.

lifetime, hath given thee ample grants in Parnassus."

"Your Eminence forgets that friends are partial," said the youth.

"Ay, those are the rarer sort—the onyx-among-pebble genus—the *few*," interrupted the cardinal; "but friends for the most part are nothing more than licensed backbiters and detractors, and by no means given to partiality."

"Well," smiled Aldobrandini—"I, being a friend to the Venetian states, have a great mind to get his holiness to fulminate a bull against Bergamo, for its monopoly in producing two poets in one century."

"Though Venetian at heart, Monsignore," said the young Torquato, "Bergamo is not quite responsible for me, for I was born at Sorrento."

"I am glad of it," replied Aldobrandini; "for visiting your native place must sometimes bring you nearer to Rome."

Here their conversation was interrupted by a great noise of sackbuts, dulcimers, and viol di gambas, for the Archduchess Joan had risen to open the ball in a *la volta* with the Prince of Parma, while the young Duke D'Urbino, whom she afterwards married, claimed the beautiful Lucrezia D'Este for his partner. The young poet stepped back some paces, behind a drapery

of banners, which effectually concealed him, thereby giving him an opportunity of unmolestedly observing the exquisite beauty of a face, which, if it only faintly resembled the portraits that are still extant of her, in all probability furnished Tasso with the loveliness of his Clorinda, the grace of his Armida, and the deep, passionate glow of inspiration in his Erminia. Be this as it may, it is certain that on that night many a sigh of the youthful poet's, like the first faint breathings of inspiration, floated across those seas, which, in after ages, have so often echoed with his strains.

The Marquis de Millepropos, and Filippo Borgia, at one and the same time presenting themselves as candidates for Bianca's hand in the dance, she gave the preference to the latter, while Bonaventuri, who was quietly awaiting his turn at a later hour of the evening, received the full benefit of the discomfited ambassador's shrug, as he retreated a few steps, exclaiming, "*Che gusto!* what wretched taste the girl hath."

"What news, Master Lovell? you are fresh from England," said Don Gomez de Sylva, to a young man, the nephew of the then English ambassador at Venice.

"In truth, not much, señor," replied the young gentleman, with a plethora of diplomatic dis-

cretion, "except that Burleigh, my Lord of Exeter, has just been made minister of state to her Majesty, and that I saw her grace looking marvellously well, and sitting her white palfrey right gallantly at Tilbury Fort, the week before I sailed, when my Lord of Southampton, who carries his years bravely, presented her with a new book of standing orders for the army, dedicated to himself, with the contents whereof, though bestowing on it but a cursory glance, her Highness did express herself graciously pleased. But as I passed through Paris, where I tarried some few days, I did learn the death of Cardinal du Bellay, and there was much speculation afloat as to the head on which the vacant hat was likely to rest."

Ghiribizzo, who had begun his evening's amusement by falling asleep on a low seat, now gave audible signs of the repose he was enjoying.

"A plague on thee for a scurvy imitator of Jove's thunder," said the Marquis de Millepropos, who sat next to him; "it is impossible to hear the sighs of the ladies for the swinish noise thou makest."

"Your Excellency's mention of Jove," cried a lean, hungry-looking individual, who sat on the other side of the dwarf, as he now leant across him, and bowed obsequiously several times to

the Marquis—"your Excellency's mention of Jove reminds me of my little poem that I have here, called 'The Heroes of Olympus and the Heroes of Earth,' in which I call your Excellency the victor of the gods, and clearly prove it."

"Pipi," said his Excellency, "you are a man of genius!" And then turning to Bianca—"Charming Bianca!" commenced the Marquis, "if you do not wish to see me expire at your feet, give me some hope, however faint, that you will not always treat me thus cruelly: only let me see the star of love rise but for one moment above the horizon of my destiny, and I will not change places with the greatest monarch of the earth. Deprive us of air, and we die; of light, and we see not; of pulsation, and we cease to be! You are all these things to me. Frown, and I die,—smile, and I live. Can you, then, trifle with an existence that is in your hands? Answer me, beautiful arbitress of my fate!" Here the music was again heard; the marquis suddenly paused in his harangue, and exclaiming, in an allegro key, "Ah, voila! the Cor-ranto! I will come back anon for your answer," darted off in quest of his partner, leaving Bianca to indulge the laughter she found it so impossible to repress, and Bonaventuri an opportunity of claiming her hand for the next dance.

As the lovers sat together at the side of the vessel, two gondolas neared it,—one with gay pennants and the livery of the Cappellos, the other a plain black one, like those belonging to the Inquisition. When the former had come alongside, Vittorio Cappello emerged from it, and was about to ascend the ship's ladder, when his arm was touched by a monk from the other gondola, whose face was closely shrouded in his cowl, and who, after whispering something in his ear, placed a paper in his hand. Vittorio nodded assent; and merely uttering the word "wait," went up the ladder, and soon stood beside his sister.

"What news of Bolzanio, brother?" asked the latter, anxiously.

"He will know the great secret before morning. There is no hope!" replied he, gloomily, adding, as he walked away, "Where is the Patriarch?—I would speak with him."

Grimani was in deep conference with the Pope's nuncio, Cento Aldobrandini; and as Vittorio approached, he heard the former say—

"I doubt it; Philip of Spain dare hardly play us false."

The Nuncio shook his head. "Your worthiness forgets, a few packets of your secret policy touching the Azores might make it worth his while."

“ True ; but——” (here the Patriarch’s voice dropped so as to make the name he uttered inaudible)—“ has been so closely guarded, that all communication with Spain has been impossible.”

“ Well,” replied Aldobrandini, “ I merely tell your worthiness that such was the rumour at the Vatican some months ago ; and the examination of Caraffa’s papers first awakened suspicion. Carlo Gritti, who was at Rome at the time, I believe, in several advices informed Bolzanio of it, with due counsel to open the matter to your worthiness.”

“ He did so,” said Grimani ; “ but young Cappello, and the vigilance of the Holy Inquisition, have been more keen than ever since that time, therefore is it impossible.”

Here Vittorio approached, and bowing to Aldobrandini and the Patriarch of Aquilea, said to the latter—“ I have a thousand apologies to make for the liberty I take in interrupting the discourse of your worthiness, but I understand this matter presses.”

And so saying, he placed the paper he had received from the monk in Grimani’s hand, who, glancing his eyes hastily over it as he held it closely to them, said—

“ Quite right ! thou didst judge fitly, Signor Vittorio.” And then the old man took a large

signet ring from his finger, bearing for inscription, in very rudely carved and primitive-looking letters, the words—

CELSI ÆLIAN^I.

To this ring, which had been in the Grimani family for ages, and which was said to have once belonged to a priest of the Temple of Jupiter at Rome, the Patriarch attached the most superstitious value, as the tradition ran, (a tradition in which he implicitly believed,) that the Grimani would ever flourish and prosper in all things so long as that ring remained with them; but that with it their glory would depart. Consequently, it never left the Patriarch's finger except on occasions of the uttermost state importance, when it served in lieu of his own presence; and the members of the Inquisition, to whom it was alone entrusted, were answerable for its safety with their lives. The old man having taken this ring from his finger, begged the support of Vittorio's arm, and desired to be conducted to the person who had given him the paper. Young Cappello led him to the side of the vessel, where the black gondola still floated. The Patriarch motioned to Vittorio to withdraw, as he leant over the side of the ship, and then, bending down his head, called out in a cautious whisper to the indi-

vidual below—"Padre Gregorio!" The monk lifted up his head, and nodded it solemnly in token of assent, but uttered no sound; whereupon the Patriarch bade him raise his hand, which having done, he placed his signet ring on the finger of the monk, who silently crossed himself, and prepared, with his solitary oar, to put his boat out to sea. Had Vittorio remained beside the Patriarch, his younger eyes might have detected the flash of demoniac triumph that glared from the monk's eyes as the wind for an instant blew aside his cowl, and the light from above fell upon his ghastly face; his younger ears might have also heard the muttered, but deep-toned, "*Trema, Venezia!*—Tremble, Venice!"—which accompanied the motion of his clenched hand, as he rowed away from the vessel. But the old man saw and heard nothing beyond the brilliant crowd around him, whose attention he was nervously anxious to divert from anything they might have heard or seen of his brief interview with the monk. Bianca was the first person he encountered; and after complimenting her upon the more than usual brilliancy of her appearance, he recognised Bonaventuri.

"Ah! my young friend, Master Salviati's pupil—a marvellously well-favoured and gallantly apparelled youth. Certes, thou hast

picked up some of the seed of honest Carlo's money-tree, which hath this advantage over all others—that its fruit and blossoms doth last all the year round, and are equally prized in every part of the world. Bianca, child! truly thou hast no bad choice, if the gold within this young cavaliero's pockets but keep pace with that without."

"I fear me, your worthiness," said the Cardinal D'Este, "at the signorina's age, a silver voice hath more charms than a golden pocket."

"No bad thing, either," rejoined the Patriarch. "We ourselves have not grown too dull-eared for the pleasure of sweet sounds, and the rumour hath reached us that this young gentleman tunes all Palestrina's most dainty airs with infinite skill; so, with his good permission, we will test the truth of this report at the banquet, to which I see this goodly company are now hastening. The favour of your arm, young sir," added Grimani, courteously; "it is not the first time that we have been indebted to its support."

The happy Bianca offered her arm on the other side, inwardly wondering how anything so nearly akin to the Signora Elena could be so amiable as the Patriarch.

Beneath an awning of violet-coloured silk, embroidered with golden-winged lions, tables had suddenly arisen, as if by magic, laden with

the rarest viands, fruits, and wines, in golden dishes, and vases of the most costly workmanship. The royal table was at the upper end of the vessel, upon a dais, over which was spread a Persian carpet of the richest kind; while from each step of the dais (there being three) hung a deep gold fringe. At the upper end of this platform, or dais, were placed two throne-shaped chairs for the Archduchess Joan and the Doge. At each side of these chairs stood a dozen pages dressed in white and gold: those on the right hand side, who stood by the chair of the Archduchess, were employed in waving to and fro large fans of peacocks' feathers; while twelve pages, on the left hand side, flung about gold censers of perfumed waters, that shed a delicious coolness through the air. At the royal table sat the Pope's nuncio, the Patriarch of Aquilea, the Cappellos, the D'Estes, and other magnates. As near to it as possible, at one of the adjoining tables, Grimani had good-naturedly bade Bonaventuri take his seat. He had scarcely done so, making room for the younger Tasso, who had selected that situation as a convenient one from whence he could unobservedly watch the beautiful Lucrezia D'Este, than Pietro raised his eyes, and encountered from the opposite side of the table those of Magini, the astrologer, fixed calmly but intently upon him. He

started with surprise ; he sat irresolute whether to recognise him or not, but was soon convinced, by a very expressive look from Magini, that the latter was the course that he wished him to adopt ; whereupon he endeavoured to turn his eyes from where the astrologer sat, and only succeeded in doing so by sending them in quest of Bianca. It was not long before the Doge espied Magini, and with many flattering speeches invited him to the royal table, in order to present him to the Archduchess. As he rose to quit the one at which he had been already seated, he took a plate of pomegranates, upon the top of which he dexterously placed another (a circumstance by no means lost upon Bonaventuri), and, handing them across to Pietro, said, in a bland, but ceremonious tone—

“ I think, signor, you were looking for this fruit.”

The Florentine had sufficient presence of mind not to evince any surprise, but merely bowing his thanks, took the pomegranate that Magini had placed above the others. During the slight confusion occasioned by the astrologer's change to the royal table, Bonaventuri found an opportunity of breaking the pomegranate, in the centre of which he found a paper, containing these words :—

“ Pierio Valeriano Bolzanio has just expired.

You can meet no more there ; so be doubly cautious—and remember, *any attempt before the 13th of December must bring destruction !*”

Bonaventuri concealed the paper till he could conveniently destroy it, and endeavoured during the rest of the banquet to look as unconcerned as he could, though, in truth, he felt excited at the strangely mysterious counsels that Magini dealt out to him from time to time, coupled as they were with his evidently accurate knowledge, not only of passing, but of future events ; so that a sort of complimentary ode to the Archduchess, set to music by Palestrina (who presided in person on the occasion), had been sung, and the guests commanded by the Doge to pledge the royal bride elect in brimming cups, ere Pietro rallied sufficiently to join in the conversation that was now flowing so rapidly around him.

“ Signor Tasso,” said he, at length, arresting the iced water which the young poet was pouring into a high golden cup, “ were this straight from Helicon, as I doubt not that it is, yet is it against all rule to drink bridal pledges in aught save a ruby flood ; for Love recognises no colours but his own.”

“ Love may not,” said the young Torquato, with a smile ; “ but Hymen, who, alas ! has but little intercourse with him, is but a dull, sober

god—a thrower of cold water, and dealer in cold truths !”

“ The more need, then, to make him blush,” said the Florentine, filling up the cup with wine. “ And from Anacreon or Valerius Flaccus downwards, I hold it that no bays ever became immortal, but such as were in some sort bedewed by Bacchus ; so here’s to yours, signor, and may they ever flourish. But of the two ascents to Parnassus, the one sacred to Apollo seems but a dull, uncertain road ; so the vine-crowned path for me !”

“ Alas !” said the young man, mournfully, as his eyes again wandered to Lucrezia D’Este, “ the bay endures but for a season ; roses fade and myrtles wither—the cypress is the only real evergreen ! Who thirsts for immortality must seek it in the grave !”

“ Ah ! think you so, signor ? then by the few young years that you have yet culled of life, may you have long and far to seek.”

“ I thank your courtesy, signor, for the wish,” replied Tasso, “ though mine own go not with it.”

Here their conversation was interrupted by a page, who brought a message from the Patriarch, requesting that Signor Bonaventuri would fill his goblet, to return the greeting which his worthiness drank to him, and then send forth his

voice in one of the right sweet sounding songs of which the Signor Salviati had informed him he knew many. Bashfulness was not in the catalogue of Bonaventuri's failings, and even if it had been, the Patriarch's wishes were commands. So bowing lowly, in acknowledgment of the pledge the Patriarch had condescended to drink to him, he sang one of his very best songs, by no means averse from displaying a talent in which he knew he excelled.

The Patriarch having set the example, the guests were unanimous in their applause of Bonaventuri's voice, which was a very beautiful tenor. Even the Archduchess commended it with more warmth than usually belonged to her words or manner, which caused Bianca to think that, at that moment, she looked less plain than she had done the whole evening. While the Signora Elena, having no fault to find with the music, restricted her censures to a regret, that the words should have been so silly, and of a tendency to make young people, if possible, more wicked than they already were.

“As a proof that I do not speak unadvisedly, your highness may just observe the sort of ocular correspondence that is going on between that very forward young damsel, Lucrezia D'Este, and that hair-brained son of Bernardo Tasso's,

since the singing of that wanton madrigal? For my part," continued the good lady, "I wonder where the Cardinal Ludovico's eyes are; did flesh and blood of mine so exemplify the effects of the fall, *I'd* soon see what fasting and penance could do for it in the way of cure; but, indeed," continued the Signora, growing fluent on the theme of her own virtue and the vices of others, "I think Nature sometimes makes a mistake, and puts masculine heads on female shoulders, the women of some families are so much cleverer than the men; for instance, there is my brother, the Patriarch, a very clever man in his way, and a great scholar, and all that, but dreadfully lax as to his inquisitorial duties, always rather for waiving than enforcing, as his station demands, the decrees of the holy office. Indeed, many heads of the church have done me the honour of telling me, that *I* should fill his position much better. And then, his merciful weakness with regard to the sex is almost as proverbial as that of old Dandalo, of whom it used to be sarcastically observed, that the only *maidens** he ever turned his back upon were those of the Inquisition."

* In the tenth, eleventh, twelfth, and even down to the beginning of the seventeenth century, an instrument of execution, very closely resembling the French guillotine, but called a "maiden," was in use in several parts of Europe.

Here the Signora Elena's lamentations were interrupted by the sound of sackbuts and dulcimers, and the dancing was again resumed with great spirit; till, as the *Morning Post* would beautifully express it, in modern parlance, "*Aurora with rosy fingers had oped the gates of light!*" While the poor benighted Venetians, having no oracle of the kind, were fain to content themselves with wood-cut representations of this fête, which appeared on the morrow, with "a correct and well-numbered account of all the goodlie company bidden and assembled thereto; beginning with her highness the Archduchess Joan; the right worshipful Gironimo Priuli, Doge of Venice; his worthiness Marino Grimani, Patriarch of Aquilea; and divers beautiful ladies and great lords, both of Italy and from beyond seas," which were sold about the streets for a gazzetta, with slices of baked zucca and beakers of iced water, for a fortnight after.

All resumed the merry dance, but Bianca, who felt too dispirited to do so after the melancholy tidings her brother had brought of her kind old preceptor Bolzanio's death; and Bonaventuri naturally preferred the occupation of consoling her to any other. At length, the guests began to depart; the Archduchess

having done so some hours before. Among the last to linger was the French ambassador, but even he, at length, took his leave; but as he stepped into his gondola, he arrested the progress of Signor Pipi, the poet, as he was getting into his, and drawing him a little aside, said to him, in a friendly whisper, which evinced infinite anxiety for his literary reputation—

“Pipi, mon abeille du Parnasse—Pipi, my bee of Parnassus—I have been thinking of your verses, and really believe that you are a true poet.”

CHAPTER IX.

“ Ay, to day,
Stern is the tyrant's mandate, red the gaze
That flashes desolation, strong the arm
That scatters multitudes. To-morrow comes !
That mandate is a thunder peal that died
In ages past ; that gaze a transient flash,
On which the midnight closed.”

P. B. SHELLEY.

AMONG the many crooked policies that characterized the different European courts, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in none were base means more frequently resorted to, to achieve base ends, than in that of Philip the Second, of Spain ; but this was more the fault of the age than of individuals. Murder was the common mode of removing all obstacles, whether private or political ; and the traffickers in blood met with little or no public odium, except in cases of its too frequent indulgence, as in the instances of Cæsar Borgia, Alessandro

de Medice, and Francesco and Galeazzo Sforza. Nor were the dagger and the bowl confined to Italy, France, or Spain; in the days of the so-called "good Queen Bess," England knew their use, and Scotland too.

But to return. Venice, in the sixteenth century, was one of the mistresses of the seas, and monopolizers of the European trade. Her secret policy was strengthened by the covert and open influence of the Holy See, which, for interests of its own, generally evinced towards her an unequivocally partial protection, over and above other Papal powers. Philip the Second, of Spain, while busily occupied with plans for the building of the Escorial—which, however, he did not commence till the year 1569—and much engrossed by the construction of his code of laws, called *Recopilacion*, was by no means indifferent to a design he had formed, of wresting a portion of the Azores from the Portuguese—a design which he could only hope to carry into execution by obtaining the collusion and assistance of the Venetian republic. An open treaty, through an ambassador, was seldom resorted to by Philip, when he could command the circuitous and covert medium of private intrigue. Among the many minions who thronged his court, there were none in whose talents he reposed such

confidence as in those of two brothers of the name of Dragoni, grandees of Spain,—the youngest a marquis, and his head chamberlain; the eldest a Jesuit, and a man of boundless enterprise, unchecked by anything like conscience. Don Manuel Dragoni possessed a plentiful quantum of low ambition, of the sort which consists in descending to the meanest acts to achieve small and present aggrandizement. For a prize at a bull-fight, or a foremost place in a pageant, he would, at any moment, have bartered his own, or his family's honour; while his broader and more daring minded brother, Ignatius, the Jesuit, ever soared into futurity, not minding, provided he scaled the uppermost heights of ambition, how often he had to make a ladder of his own soul.

In order to carry the point he had in view about the Azores, Philip preferred the back-stair policy of sending Don Manuel Dragoni to Venice, not in any ostensibly official situation, but merely to fill the honourable office of spy in the camp; with, nevertheless, plenipotentiary (but secret) powers to do everything and anything to possess himself of the secret policy of the Venetians respecting the Azores—that is, anything short of compromising the openly professed faith of Spain with that Republic.

This method having been adopted, in preference

to any open and honourable negotiation through the medium of Don Gomez de Sylva, Dragoni was despatched to Venice, with a princely retinue, but with apparently no other purpose than that of a Spanish hidalgo in quest of his own personal recreation. It was some three years previous to the period stated at the commencement of this tale, that he had arrived in Venice; and as Elena Grimani was at that time still withering on the virgin thorn, in the Patriarch's palace, Dragoni thought that the surest plan for initiating himself into the state secrets which daily strewed the table of the Patriarch's library, would be to become a suitor to the Signora Elena; and as he possessed a large fierce pair of circular black eyes, a perfect black forest of beard and whisker, and a pair of legs which formed very substantial pillars to the Doric capitals of his trunk hose, is it to be wondered at, that a lady of the Signora Elena's discrimination should, at a very early period of their acquaintance, have been induced to kindle the torch of Love with the fire of Vesta, and give Don Manuel hopes of soon possessing the most curious piece of antiquity in all Venice? Were people labouring under an attack of the tender passion ever supposed to have the use of their external senses, one

peculiarity in the marquis's mode of making love must have struck her—which was, that he never appeared to be able to pour out his feelings with any degree of fluency except in the Patriarch's library ; for which reason he generally deferred his visits to the Palazzo Grimani till such times as he knew its master was at the council ; and even while in this diplomatic sanctum, Dragoni was ever fonder of calling the lady's attention to the view to be seen from out the window, than of selfishly monopolizing her looks.

Things were progressing after this fashion, till one day—about the sixth month of his suit, and one month previous to their nuptials—as the lady was, as usual, at his suggestion, straining her sight to see a sail that was not on the sea, and as Don Manuel was making hasty extracts from some sheets of parchment that lay half open on the table, the Patriarch, who had forgotten some of the orders of the day, returned into his library by a secret entrance, which communicated directly from the narrow street at the back of his palace.

The Patriarch, seeing Dragoni's occupation, advanced noiselessly behind him, and, placing his spectacles before his eyes, read the whole transcript of his own private reports about the

Azores ! Being satisfied of the treachery of this proceeding, Grimani grasped Don Manuel's cloak, and stamped his foot for a guard always in waiting—namely, three inquisitors—who perfectly understood the summons. He ordered the terrified Marquess to be instantly secured and searched : other and more important papers were found upon him ; but as it was part of the compact between Philip and his agent, that no Spanish names should ever be mentioned in their correspondence, there was no tracing the plot home to any individual except Dragoni, who knew his only chance of ultimate release was to keep his master's secret inviolable.

As no prisoner could be incarcerated in the Inquisition without a formal warrant from the Doge, the Patriarch gave orders that Dragoni should be placed in an adjoining room, at the door of which the inquisitors should watch till his return from the dogal palace. As it may be supposed, Don Manuel was in no enviable state of mind. He knew that Philip's policy would be openly to join the Venetian Republic in condemning him, to shew that he himself was not implicated in the matter ; and he feared that his royal exasperation would be so great at his want of skill in allowing himself to be detected, that he dared scarcely hope that he would covertly

assist him. But "necessity is the mother of invention," and the reverie occasioned by this painful dilemma only lasted a few minutes, when Dragoni, who always carried writing materials about him, resolved upon writing a few hasty lines to his brother Ignatius, at Madrid, and trusting to chance for their conveyance. In this letter he briefly stated the misfortune which had befallen him, and his horror of the dungeon that awaited him, imploring his brother to use all possible exertions in his behalf; while, in order to placate the King, he threw out broad hints of his being in possession of much fuller and more important information than he really was. He had scarcely finished this letter, ere the Patriarch and an official guard returned to convey him to prison. Slipping the letter up his sleeve, he followed the three inquisitors and the guard quietly down a back staircase, for it was not deemed expedient by the ultra-politic Venetian senate to have it known publicly that any one could have the temerity to conspire against it; consequently, all delinquents of that nature were punished as secretly as possible. Upon arriving at the wharf, Dragoni humbly requested that he might be allowed to take a last farewell of his faithful page, Pedro Velasquez, who was then awaiting him with his gondola at the great entrance. In con-

sideration of his rank, this courtesy was not refused, and the boy was accordingly sent for. No sooner had he appeared, than Don Manuel flung himself upon his neck, slipping the letter he had written to his brother down the page's ruff; and from the tight pressure of his hand in placing it there, the latter knew there was something that required his particular attention; and the boy was faithful to his trust, for that night he consigned it to the care of a Spanish merchant who was going straight to Madrid.

And what were the Lady Elena's feelings on this trying occasion? So poignant was her grief for the loss of her lover, that it was deemed by some of the most skilful doctors, both in Padua and Venice, that even her life might be the forfeit were he not instantly replaced by another! Accordingly, Count Bartolommeo Cappello was thought an eligible substitute, and he was too good a citizen not to do anything that was deemed advisable for the good of the state; and how could he shew his patriotism more than by preventing so great a scandal as it would be to have it said that a daughter of San Marc's, and a sister of the Patriarch of Aquilea, had died for love of a foreign spy? The Signora Elena, being equally patriotic, was precisely of the same opinion; and no sooner had she accepted

of the Count Bartolommeo—which, with a generosity of heart and decision of purpose which cannot be too much emulated by every member of her sex under similar circumstances, she did exactly one minute and a quarter after he had uttered his proposals—than she caused several masses to be said for the providential escape she had had in not uniting her fate with that of an enemy to Venice !

Meanwhile, Ignatius was not idle ; and allowing for the time which in those days necessarily elapsed for a voyage to and from Spain, his movements evinced astonishing celerity ; and having received a large sum of secret service money from Philip, with a *carte blanche* to effect his brother's release, provided he did not compromise the court of Spain, he set off for Venice, having first of all taken refuge in the incognito of a Spanish Jew, and assumed the name of José Agnado. As a vendor of shawls, brocades, amber, jewels, and amulets, he contrived to mix with all classes from the highest to the lowest. While he was thus making himself master of all that could be discovered at Venice, his sister, Donna Maraquita Della Torre, a young and handsome widow, and mistress to the ill-fated Cardinal Caraffa, was equally indefatigable at Rome in transmitting the secrets of

the Vatican to Madrid—all of which raised the Dragonis high in Philip's favour, and made him sincere in his wishes for the release of Don Manuel. But Donna Maraquita not having been sufficiently cautious, on one occasion, in expediting her intelligence to Spain, suspicion was aroused. She was closely watched, and secret advices were sent to Bolzanio to apprise the Venetian government to keep a keen look out for Ignatius Dragoni, whom there was reason to believe was somewhere secreted in Venice. This information, as the reader may remember, Bolzanio communicated to Vittorio Cappello; but so perfect was Ignatius Dragoni's disguise, and so subtle the manner in which he played his assumed part, that he baffled the uttermost vigilance of the argus eyes that were on the look out for him. His brother, for the first year of his incarceration, by no means received rigorous treatment, or tenanted one of the worst dungeons, which confirmed Ignatius in his resolve of not attempting his escape till all things should be ripe and secure for it, especially as, after the execution of Cardinal Caraffa, his sister was banished from Rome, and had taken refuge in Florence, where she was living in great obscurity, not having yet succeeded, as she afterwards did, in being vilely subservient

to Francesco de Medici. There was, as it were, a pause in the events that Ignatius had been moulding to his purpose, and from the suspicion the examination of Cardinal Caraffa's papers had excited against the Dragonis, a double guard was placed upon Don Manuel, and his dungeon exchanged for one of the worst in the inquisition, which nevertheless had the advantage, being immediately under the Bridge of Sighs, of enabling Ignatius to convey more frequently, through the bars, under which was moored the sinking boat, and at the side of which was the small grating of Don Manuel's cell, sundry written promises of assistance, and injunctions to hope. Nothing, however, occurred to foster Ignatius's hope, and indeed he was almost beginning to despair, when, in one of his nightly visits to Ferrai, he discovered him at work upon the mysterious silver key ordered by the Patriarch, and invented by Baptista Bonaventuri for the further security of Dragoni. At this his delight was unbounded, as, from his knowledge of the man, he knew that his integrity, however previously and solemnly pledged, would not be proof against a fresh supply of gold. Once possessed of the key (which, from a key-hole audience in the Palazzo Grimani, while waiting to sell some Damascus brocade, he had discovered was for

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the security of a Spanish prisoner, and felt that prisoner must be his brother,) it may appear strange that he should have kept faith with Ferrai in returning to Spain, but for this he had two cogent reasons: the first was the more effectually to baffle the goldsmith's suspicion, which he saw was aroused, and the other was to obtain a fresh supply of money to meet all the exigencies that might occur in promoting his brother's escape. He delayed no longer in Madrid than was absolutely necessary, but he returned no more to Venice as Agnado the Jew, but as Frate Geronimo, a Benedictine friar. Six months having elapsed since the sale of the key and Agnado's departure, all suspicion had died away in Ferrai's mind as to the equity of José's intentions, and he gave himself up to the enjoyment of his ill-gotten gains, without any of the drawbacks of fear and incertitude. Upon Ignatius's return to Venice, he found that his brother's fate had taken a darker and more painful turn. Twice a week, and sometimes oftener, Don Manuel was terrified and examined at midnight, previous to his being put to the torture—a ceremony which was now fixed at a fortnight hence—in order to make him confess the full extent of his designs against the Republic of Venice. Ignatius felt, therefore,

that now was the time to strike the blow, but how to do it successfully, and so as to baffle all suspicion, was still a question; when luckily, the *fête* given by the Admiral of the Fleet to the Archduchess Joan furnished his enterprising genius with the idea of the stratagem, the execution of which we have already described. In his new character of a Benedictine friar, he had formed a close intimacy with the grand inquisitor, Padre Gregoria, who made him tolerably well acquainted with the business of the Inquisition, and amongst other matters, with the course at the time pursuing with his own brother. The very night of Fillippo Vasi's *fête*, Ignatius had been with Padre Gregorio to assist at the burial of a monk at the Spanish convent on the Lido. Returning together in one of the gondolas of the Inquisition, the latter happened to say—

“ A penance on all short memories. I meant to have paid our Spanish prisoner a visit to-night, but forgot to send for the Patriarch's signet-ring; and even I, after midnight, cannot gain access to the lower dungeons without it; and he is, by this time, away at the Admiral's *fête*.”

“ It is, indeed, provoking,” said Ignatius, with affected sympathy.

“ Yes,” continued Gregorio, more in reply to his own thoughts than Ignatius’s remark—“ for to-night I meant to have tried him in the *Cap-pella dei Morti*—the chapel of the dead.”*

This was enough for Ignatius ; and no sooner had the Grand Inquisitor arrived at his own door, than the former asked, with much apparent carelessness, if he would lend him the gondola for an hour.

“ For the whole night, if you like ; for having writings to prepare for Rome, I shall not be abroad again till morning,” said the chief inquisitor.

The Jesuit thanked him ; and, assuring him that he should find the gondola at his own stairs in an hour, waved his hand in token of farewell, and telling the gondolier he should not want him, put out to sea, and made, by a circuitous row, for the Admiral’s ship. He had almost neared it, when he perceived Vittorio Cappello’s splendid gondola, and it instantly occurred to him that the safest plan would be to make him the medium of communication with the Patriarch, and accordingly he hastily wrote on a

* A chapel attached to the Inquisition, wherein was nightly acted the most fearful representations of eternity, or rather of perdition, by which confessions were often extorted from weak-minded prisoners.

piece of paper, in the usual monkish formula, and the universal character of the sixteenth century, which made one hand differ little, if anything, from another, a request for the Patriarch's signet-ring, and signed it, "Gregorio Inquisitore Maggiore."

This stratagem, as we have already seen, succeeded perfectly; and no sooner had Ignatius obtained the Patriarch's ring, than, armed with this "open sesame," he returned to the house of the chief inquisitor, whom he found busy writing by the aid of a large silver lamp, and a flask of malvoisie.

Even the lion heart of Ignatius Dragoni stood still, as he paused for an instant at the inquisitor's door, ere he knocked for admittance. "If I should fail!—*if*, ay, *if*!—that is the hinge on which turns all great events; so, now for it,"—and the Jesuit knocked sonorously, and without the slightest trepidation, at the door.

"Come in!" cried Gregorio, in a somewhat irritable voice, at the intrusion.

"Oh, it is you, Frate Geronimo!"

"It is me, holy father; and I have to offer a thousand apologies for disturbing you at so unseasonable an hour," replied Ignatius, in an humble and imploring voice; "but the fact is,

I have just had advices from Florence that my oldest friend, Steffano Antinori, the superior of Santa Maria Novella, lieth at the point of death, and would see me and his nephew, who has just entered on his novitiate in the Benedictines here, if possible, ere he depart; and I would crave at your hands a passport of the Inquisition that shall carry us safely, without let or hindrance, through all straits, civil and ecclesiastical, till we reach Florence."

"You shall have it," said Gregorio, withdrawing from a pile a sheet of blank parchment, with three large black iron seals appended to it, while in three pieces of black ribbon, in a triangle, was an all-seeing eye done in silver, with the motto of *Hic et ubique* under it.

As Gregorio prepared to fill up this parchment, with the necessary injunctions to furnish good mules, and even money, to the bearer, if necessary, he began to comment upon Steffano Antinori's death.

"So young," said he; "only forty-one—'tis a warning to us all to put more order into our lives. How call you the young man, his nephew?"

"Please you, father, he is not so young either, being just one year younger than his uncle, and of so olive a complexion, that he

seemeth to have even the shadow of more years upon him still. His secular name is Sylvio Antinori, but the one bestowed upon him by our order is Frate Filippo."

"Well," said Gregorio, writing rapidly on, while the keen eyes of Ignatius as rapidly perused his countenance, "this will facilitate your journey as much as may be. Commend me to the superior of Santa Maria Novella, if he still tarries on this side the grave, when you reach Florence; and tell him we will see to several additional masses being said for his soul's health in San Marc's. And, doubtless," continued the chief inquisitor, detaching a large agate rosary from his girdle, "your transit through the Appenines will not be so rapid but you can find time to give this as a token of our good will to that holy man, Fabio the hermit, who has his dwelling at Covigliajo."

"Even were it so," replied Ignatius, crossing himself devoutly, "I would find time, holy father, to do your bidding."

So saying, they exchanged farewells, and the Jesuit took his departure, but not before he espied the chief inquisitor's cloak and cap carelessly thrown upon a bench near the door; and thinking it a pity that they should be neglected there, he gently abstracted them as he passed, imagining,

no doubt, that they would prefer a midnight ramble, and a visit to their accustomed haunt, the Inquisition. No sooner had Ignatius regained the gondola, than he pushed swiftly, but noiselessly, out of the little creek into the grand canal. On his way to the Bridge of Sighs, he had occasion again to pass the admiral's ship. The music still swelled the air; and the guests were, for the second time that night, essaying a foreign dance.

"Dance on!" muttered Ignatius; "foul speed your lilts! but some of you shall dance to another tune, ere sun-down to-morrow!"

And with this threat he steered completely under, and rowed round the Admiral's ship, and so cut across by the Piazzetta of the dogal palace, to the Bridge of Sighs. Not a light gleamed either from the prison or the palace; even the executioner, who guarded the death-boat, was asleep in his murderous barque, with his mask partially raised from his mouth. And thinking it better not to awaken him till the last moment, lest his suspicions should be also roused, Ignatius hastily concealed himself in the chief inquisitor's cloak and cap, and mooring the gondola on the palace side, resolved, under cover of Gregorio's dress, and the Patriarch's ring, to go boldly through the palace,

and pass over the covered bridge to the prison. There was something fearful in the stillness that reigned around ; and as the Jesuit traversed the broad and silent court, the echoes of his own footsteps fell like warnings upon his heart. Nevertheless, his fate and that of his brother hung upon the present hour, and he pushed boldly on till he came to the steps of the lions, from each balustrade of which a flickering torch still blazed, and the drowsy sentinels shouldered arms to the garb of the chief inquisitor, as its present wearer ascended the broad and blood-stained steps. A dark cloud passed over the moon ; and but for the feeble glimmer from the torches below, all would have been in total darkness ; but as it was, their pale red glare fell mystically upon a huge but perfectly motionless, figure, on the first landing, entering the gallery. Ignatius stretched out his hand to avoid stumbling against it, whatever it might be, and in so doing his fingers became glued together with a cold gelatinous matter, which struck a chill to his heart that for a moment made even his undaunted spirit quail,—especially as at that instant a howl, more piteous than can be described, rent the air. Albeit no believer in the superstitions which it was his trade to propagate, he nevertheless felt that degree of disquietude which

a mysterious incertitude is sure to create, even in the sternest minds. For a moment, he deliberated whether to stand still or advance, when the howl was again repeated more piteously than before ; and the moon, just then throwing off the black veil that had shrouded her, discovered the tall figure to be a "maiden" which had been left standing in its present position since the execution of a criminal, which had taken place at sunset ; and it was in his unknown blood that Ignatius had dabbled his fingers.

"Tush !" said he, almost aloud, "there is blood in which I'd rather steep my hands than thine, poor knave, whoever thou wast !" And as he spoke, he held his hand at arm's length from his side, when he suddenly felt something like a ball of ice come against the palm of his hand, while his blood-stained fingers were eagerly licked by a hot, small tongue. Upon looking down he beheld a little brown Pomeranian dog, probably the truest friend in life, as beyond it, of the poor wretch who had been executed that evening.

"Begone !" cried Ignatius, kicking the poor animal from him, who raised his brown, melancholy eyes imploringly to the face of him who spurned him ; and heedless of the rebuff, attracted, no doubt, by the scent of his former

master's blood, continued to follow in a crouching attitude, while the Jesuit, to make up for the time he had lost, strode hastily through the gallery till he came to the door on the left-hand side, which opened into the Bridge of Sighs. He touched a spring, which rang a bell on the other side, and immediately the door turned on its noiseless and invisible hinges; and no sooner had the Jesuit cleared the threshold than it closed as noiselessly and instantaneously as it had opened the minute before. Upon reaching the other side of the short and covered bridge, he had the same ceremony to go through; but within the door on this, the prison side, sat a porter of the Inquisition. Ignatius spoke not; but drawing his cap closely over his eyes, and holding his mantle before his mouth with his left hand, held the Patriarch's ring before the porter's eyes, who thereupon allowed him to pass without let or hindrance. He walked hastily, but noiselessly on, till he came to the chamber of the Council of Ten. A large black iron lamp was suspended from the ceiling, which shed a brilliant light upon a large octagon oak table, covered with black leather, and strewn with many parchments and papers, tied with black tape, and interspersed with various new instruments of torture. On a dais, under

a pall-like canopy of black velvet and silver fringe, with an all-seeing eye, in silver, placed in the centre above it, were two large throne-shaped black velvet and silver chairs, for the Doge and the Patriarch of Aquilea; round the octagon table were light, black leather, narrow, high-backed, round-seated chairs. Ignatius, as he drew a small dark-lantern from his pocket, and prepared to light it from the great lamp by means of a long taper, which always stood in the corner of the room, glanced his eye over a document which lay unfolded and half finished before the chief inquisitor's chair. He had not read far before he perceived it to be a greeting from the Venetian Senate to Philip the Second of Spain, giving him cogent, complimentary, and withal satisfactory reasons for the execution of Don Manuel Dragoni. Opposite to this, another inquisitor had been at work, upon an imaginary conversation, purporting to be the trial and examination of the aforesaid Don Manuel, Hidalgo of Spain and Count of the Holy Roman Empire, before the holy and most honourable Council of Ten.

"These will be pleasant reading for our leisure hours amid the vineyards of Tuscany," muttered Ignatius between his ground teeth, with a sardonic grin, as he clenched the two pieces of

parchment, and concealed them in his bosom. Then taking up the small dark lantern he had lit, he went carefully round the room, keeping close to the wall, in order to avoid the treacherous trap-door that was somewhere towards the centre of the chamber, where so many victims, under pretext of being advanced towards the tribunal for a fair trial, had been hurled, without a single note of preparation, many a fathom deep into the dark world of waters that foamed and lashed below. After passing his hand carefully along the wall as he went, Ignatius at length came to the panel he was in search of, and, touching a spring, it slid back, and discovered a narrow, dark, winding staircase, with barely sufficient room in the landing for one person to stand at ease. The Jesuit entered, and, carefully closing the panel behind him, began descending the narrow flight, which, as he progressed downwards, had a damp and mouldy smell; and so dense and charnel-like was the atmosphere, that, all enclosed as it was, the light began to flicker in the lantern he carried. These stairs led to three miserable dungeons, the last of which opened upon the water, where the death-boat was always moored, into which many a victim was conveyed at midnight, and sunk in the open sea; while the executioner retained his post

night and day in a small but sea-worthy barque beside it.

It was in this last dungeon that Don Manuel Dragoni was confined; and as these three cells were considered as the stronghold of the Inquisition, upon account of there being no access to them but through the chamber of the Council of Ten, guards were dispensed with at the door. Ignatius held up the lantern, to examine the first door he came to; there was a black cross on it, and the words, "July 10th, 1560, sunset, A. L.," which was merely a memorandum of when the execution of the inmate of that cell was to take place. The next door had the effigy of a rack, with "First experiment, June 18th (which was the next day), 1560, midnight, C. B." chalked on it. The last door displayed a "maiden," with a gory head done in red chalk, and the letters "D. M. D.—Finis, June 30th, 1560." Had any doubt remained of this being Don Manuel's dungeon, it would have been removed by the massive silver lock on the door, which Ignatius recognised as the one he had so often seen Ferrai working at, and the key of which he then withdrew from his pocket.

"The 30th!" muttered he, as he noiselessly inserted the key in the lock—"sweet sirs, your

gibbet must hunt some other game, for this bird will have flown beyond your reach."

As he spoke, there came a low, deep, booming, melancholy sound from the plashing of the water without, through a small grating in the wall, by no means calculated to inspire hope even in the most sanguine. Ignatius finally turned the silver key in the lock, and entered the cell. As he was about to close the door after him, something rushed quickly past him, and even slightly brushed his ankles; but on looking round to ascertain what it could be, he discovered nothing but the attenuated form of his sleeping brother; if sleep that could be called which seemed to be only a convulsive struggling and grappling with dampness and darkness. On his worn and emaciated throat lay a bloated and loathsome toad, which all his struggles did not in the least seem to discompose, as the creature slept unctuously on, quaffing full breathings of the foul and noisome air, as though it had been nectar. Ignatius looked with a shudder at the miserable mass of bones and squalid emaciation that constituted all that remained of his once joyous and robust brother, and, dashing to a short distance the loathsome reptile that was nestling on his throat, crushed out its slow and vapid life, ere he proceeded to awaken its companion. An

adept in dungeon vigils, the Jesuit refrained from touching him, but merely passed the light closely to and fro before his eyes—when the wretched sleeper started to his knees, exclaiming, with clasped hands—

“Anything!—everything you please, good Signor! Only one day—one hour more!”

“What! give us up the interests of Spain and King Philip unconditionally?” asked Ignatius, ironically.

“Ye—”

But before Don Manuel could achieve the assenting monosyllable, Ignatius doffed the chief inquisitor’s cap, and held the light before his own face. Don Manuel raised his eyes vacantly to his brother’s, and then burying his face in his hands, murmured—

“This dream again. Oh, brother! it is not well, even in dreams, to mock me thus.”

“Nay, nay, Manuel, look again, and *feel* that it is no dream,” said Ignatius, taking his brother’s hand, and passing it along his own arm, while something like moisture gathered in his eyes, as he added—“indeed, indeed, I come not to trouble thee, but to free thee! Dost not remember Ignatius, thy brother?—thine only brother?—thy friend and playmate, when life was young.

Ignatius had touched the only chord on memory's many-stringed instrument that vibrated truly; and the unhappy captive, for the first time since his incarceration, burst into a flood of tears which seemed at once to quench the fire, and restore to their pristine freshness the remembrances it had erased from his brain, as he flung himself upon his brother's neck. The night was waning, or rather morning was advancing, apace; but, impatient as Ignatius was to complete the scheme he had so successfully begun, he was obliged to proceed slowly and cautiously in his difficult task of making his brother comprehend the happy change he had come to effect in his prospects. When he had at length, at the end of half an hour—every sand of which appeared to the Jesuit's impatient fears a century—succeeded in making Don Manuel comprehend the necessity of exertion for immediate flight, and having got him to exchange his prison dress for that of a Benedictine friar, which he had brought with him, he took his hand, and led, or rather dragged him, from the dungeon. His next step was to carefully lock the door, and secure the silver key within his girdle, so that there should not be the minutest trace of the door having been opened, or the cell having been entered. He then hurried

along the dark narrow passage, dragging his companion after him, till they reached the small iron grated door, that opened under the Bridge of Sighs, and shooting back the bolts, opened it, and stood upon the steps where his gondola was moored. The sleeping executioner in the opposite death-boat suddenly roused himself at the noise, but a sign from Ignatius, who personated Padre Gregorio, and a muttered "Sleep on, friend," restored the headsman to his slumbers, as the Jesuit, devoutly crossing himself, and hurrying Don Manuel into the boat, shot under the bridge, and in less than ten minutes was out at sea. The day was faintly dawning, but through such a misty shroud that it seemed as if morning were overpowered with sleep, and night's curtains still undrawn. The fishermen even slept on their nets; and the fleet, with its gay pennants and expiring lamps, tossed languidly to and fro in the port, like faded beauties, on whose revels the unwelcome day-light had stolen. The very waters returned a drowsy lulling sound, to the strong appeals of Ignatius's swiftly plied oars,—all, in short, conspired to favour his enterprise. By the time the gondola reached Fuzino, the first faint ray of gold had appeared in the east; but long before the bright eyes in Venice had

awakened from their first slumber, or the silver locks of the Patriarch of Aquilea and the sable robes of the senators had floated in the council chamber, the fugitives had, in the guise of two Benedictine friars, reached Padua, and started for Verona.

CHAPTER X.

“Ye have no cause to fear : be bold,
For you may here lie uncontroll’d ;
And ye in this have good advantage,
For lying is your common usage.”

JOHN HEYWOOD.

It was towards evening, the day after the admiral’s fête, before Arianna entered her young mistress’s room, and drew aside the delicate lace net-work that guarded her from the attacks of those worst of Italian plagues, the gnats.

“Silly child,” said Bianca, starting up, and putting aside the crimson silk drapery, that cast a rich glow over her peach-like cheek, “you have let me lose the whole day !”

“Every one has done the same, I believe—at least, every one who was at the fête,” replied Arianna. “I came in several times, signorina, but you slept so calmly, I could not find it in my heart to waken you, though the French

ambassador was here by noon, with barren inquiries after your health; and then came Master Lovell with this pair of broidered gloves, and this delicate posy of precious stones, which he hoped your bright eyes would deign to look upon. Those English have not bad ideas, could they but give their actions with a more graceful manner; but the poor youth gave his rich gifts with so awkward a gait, that one would have thought *his* had been this poor offering of myrtle and Provence roses, and the Signor Bonaventuri's the more costly one of gems."

"I love Provence roses," said Bianca, burying her blushing face in Bonaventuri's bouquet, which she had seized, while poor Master Lovell's more costly presents lay unheeded on the coverlet.

"But I forgot," resumed Arianna; "here is also a letter from the Signora Lucrezia D'Este."

"Give it to me," said Bianca, with some slight embarrassment; "I think it concerns you."

"Me!"

"Even so; but of this by-and-by, for here is Caterina to say the bath is ready," said Bianca, as she followed her tire-woman into the adjoining bath room.

"I wonder what the young Contessa D'Este can have to write about me?" thought Arianna

as she arranged the jewels, essences, and knick-nacks, on the toilette table. But she was not left long to wonder; for no sooner had Bianca returned from the bath, than, dismissing Caterina, and resigning her bright chestnut tresses into the hands of Arianna, she began, with much of the awkward confusion with which most persons who are not adepts in deception, generally proclaim false motives for their actions.

“Do you know, child, that you have made a conquest?—nay, never blush, and picture some handsome cavaliero, ready to run a tilt and break a lance in your service, for the sake of half a look within the next seven years, for 'tis nothing of the kind; only my beautiful young friend, Lucrezia D'Este, who has fallen in love with you, and would fain kidnap you away to her brother's lovely place of Belri-guardo.”

“Surely, dear lady,” said Arianna, as the tears fell upon the beautiful tresses she was braiding, “you will not—you do not mean to send me away from you.”

“Send you away, dear Arianna, is not the word,” interrupted Bianca, quite as much affected, and infinitely more confused than her attendant; “but—that is—I think—what I mean is, that since my father's marriage with that

detestable old woman, the Palazzo Cappello is nothing more nor less than a state prison; and I am not so selfish as not to feel"—and here Bianca blushed at accusing herself of a virtue that, in this instance, she had no pretension to—"I am not so selfish as not to feel that you would be infinitely better placed at the gay court of Duke Alphonso, where your beauty and your virtues might captivate some noble youth into forgetting your father's station, and placing you in that which, I feel convinced, nature and fate have designed you for. Besides, there you would be free from Vittorio's unwelcome importunities."

Till the sound of this name fell upon her ear, the young girl had remained with all her faculties numbed and suspended, but it had roused her into a painful consciousness, and a supernatural calmness and energy. The affection and the pride that might have been wounded at Bianca's wish to part with her, was at once restored to their wonted equipoise, by her jumping with a woman's quick and unerring penetration, to the right conclusion, that it was her young patroness's daily and hourly increasing love for, and entanglement with, Bonaventuri, that made her—and alone made her—wish to transfer her to Lucrezia D'Este, that she might be free from the irksome restraint of the

presence of a person of whom she had made a second self; and also, perhaps, from a generous wish to shield her from the fearful vengeance that must befall all her attendants, especially so intimate a one, should any discoveries take place relative to her increasing intercourse with Bonaventuri; and in this latter idea, she did Bianca no more than justice. Arianna was above the littleness of mind that cannot make a sacrifice to another, without letting that other know that they see through the motives, however highly varnished and well-disguised, that induce them to exact it; so gently placing the last bodkin in Bianca's hair, she replied calmly, and as though it were her own perfect conviction:—

“You are right, signora, I *shall* be better there, and I thank you for this considerate attention to my welfare; but should you ever leave the Palazzo Cappello—that is, when you marry—” hesitated Arianna, “you will then allow me to return to you, will you not, dear lady?”

“To be sure, I will,” replied Bianca, affectionately throwing her arms round Arianna's neck, “for, indeed, I never shall be happy till you do; and see, even poor Tafano, who was sleeping so intently, has roused himself to tell you the same thing in his little way; but,”

added she, with a sort of nervous trepidation, lest anything might thwart a plan, which had in the onset succeeded beyond her most sanguine expectation, "I would rather you mentioned this projected change (which will not take place for six weeks) to no one—not even your father, whom I will undertake to inform of the matter in due time; for somehow or other, everything here now is contradiction, and I'm very certain were the sun to ask permission to rise of a morning, he would be denied it; so like him, I mean to pursue my own course, without appealing to any one, for now that poor Bolzanio is no more, who have I to appeal to?"

At a later hour on this same evening, Baptista was closeted with Ferrai the goldsmith. They were discussing some money-making project, when three loud and distinct knocks, the well-known signals of a visit from the holy office, were heard on the outer door.

"There! there! I told you so!—I told you so!" almost screamed Baptista, falling on his knees, and clasping an iron money-chest, as if that were a sanctuary that must shield him from all harm.

"What have you been doing?" stammered Ferrari, with quivering lip—"surely, you never sold the secret of that key?"

“Who, I!—Heaven forbid! But what could put such a strange, wild thought into your head?”

“Oh, nothing—nothing! but fear engenders strange fancies,” replied the goldsmith; and here his own seemed to overpower him, for as the ominous triple knock was again repeated, he hid his face within his hands, and sank down upon a bench. While Ferrai’s and Baptista’s limbs were thus trembling in concert, the assault on the outer door became louder, and more determined.

“Go—go! for mercy’s sake, go you and open the door, good master Ferrai! *You* can have nothing to fear, for you are not even in your own house; but I!—I!—what *will* become of me?” exclaimed the old man, again clasping the iron chest; for with him misfortune, or danger, had but one association, extending to and not beyond, a separation from his gold.

Ferrai, to whom the words, “*you are not in your own house,*” had imparted a sudden ray of courage and consolation, by occasioning him to reflect, that had the holy office sent in quest of him, their emissary would most assuredly have sought him in his own home, now rose with a firmer, if not a firm step, and bidding Baptista take courage, proceeded to open the door, with

an obsequious bow to the inquisitorial familiar, who strode solemnly into the hall, and then merely waving his hand to the goldsmith, he passed on into the counting-house; where, stopping in the very centre, he slowly flou-
rished his writ of office, and intoning his words, delivered himself as follows:—

“ Signor Baptista Bonaventuri, merchant of Venice, in the firm of the most worshipful Signor Carlo Salviati; and you, Giovanni Lorenzino Ferrai, *filadoto*, native and craftsman of this city, dwelling upon and driving your trade on the new bridge, called of the Rialto, are hereby cited to appear within the hour before the most worshipful the Doge, his worthiness the Patriarch of Aquilea, and the Holy Padra Gregorio, chief inquisitor of the Holy Office, who further administer unto you these gracious advices—to wit, that you will be in no ways alarmed at the summons, as it is merely sent for the propounding of a single query, which they think it may be in your powers to clear up; furthermore, that you keep this summons a close secret from all men; and thirdly, that you lose no time in accompanying me, the servitor of the holy office, to the Dogal palace; and so end my instructions.”

Knowing that from such a summons there

was no appeal, Baptista and the goldsmith, with trembling limbs and blanched cheeks, prepared to obey, the latter advancing first, while the former lingered behind, and hastily unlocking the iron chest he had been so tenderly embracing, abstracted from it a large leathern bag, filled with gold pieces, which he hastily concealed about his person, and which, from its ponderous weight, considerably impeded the progress of his always feeble limbs and tardy movements. At length, however, the trio found themselves at the end of the street, where at the small wharf one of the black gondolas of the inquisition awaited them, and where for the first time silence was broken by Ferrai's courteously pressing the familiar to take the upper seat in the gondola, which the other with equal courtesy declined, and which Baptista could not be prevailed on to accept, on account of the over weight which he carried about him, which made the act of stooping, necessary to get to the upper end of the boat, more than his feeble strength could support. So he preferred remaining as ballast with the gondolier; and a profound silence again ensued, till the little bark shot noiselessly round into the wharf of the Dogal Piazzetta, where, with another paroxysm of trembling, Baptista and the goldsmith got out,

and followed their guide up a winding back staircase, into a sort of private council chamber in the palace. The room in question was neither very long nor very wide, but longer of the two than wide; the walls were hung with violet coloured velvet, richly embroidered. From the ceiling were suspended four large brilliantly lit silver lamps, which shed their light upon three grave and dignified-looking personages, and upon the papers before them. The first of these persons, on the right, was the Patriarch of Aquileia, wearing his mitre, and in full pontificals. Next to him, sat Geronimo Priuli, Doge of Venice—a small, spare, insignificant-looking man, with still, dark eyes. The third and last person seated at the table was Padre Gregorio, the chief inquisitor, whose stalwart figure, joined as it was to his dark and boding countenance, formed a strong contrast to his two companions. Any, even the most casual, observer, could not have failed to remark, that he was the only one ill at ease of the three. The escape of his Spanish prisoner had, indeed, perplexed and excited him beyond measure. The Doge and Patriarch merely exchanged comfits out of round gold boxes, and conjectures out of heads by no means long enough to compete with Padre Gregorio's, who had been the first to suggest an

examination of the banker and goldsmith, as the designer and artificer of the mysterious key. Matters were at this stage when a gentle knock was heard at the door of the council chamber.

“Ha, here are our men!” cried the chief inquisitor, rubbing his hands with an air of infinite satisfaction.

“Come in!” said the Doge. And the door was noiselessly and cautiously opened, and a modest looking young man, in a plain suit of coloured velvet, his cap in one hand and a large letter in the other, entered.

“Ho, the Sieur Colbert!” cried the Doge, with more of irritation than courtesy in his tone.

“Most reverend and worshipful signors,” said the young man, bowing profoundly, “I crave your pardons all, jointly and separately, for this apparently unseasonable intrusion, but the Marquis de Millepropos, whom ye are aware, through the Queen of France’s and the Marechal de Retz’s warrants, hath private speech with all your ears, charged me with the delivery of this packet from the Cardinal de Lorraine on the instant, and craves an audience, at the end of an hour, on pressing matters from Paris.”

“We will see him in our private closet within the hour. And now, young sir, that you have

done your mission with good discretion, and right trustily, you may retire," said the Doge, with a courteous inclination of his head, but a contracted brow, as the young man retired, as respectfully and noiselessly as he had entered.

"Now, by my wedded waves, whose faithful bosom bears the fortunes of our state so prosperously, it is too bad," exclaimed Priuli, as soon as the door had closed upon the Sieur Colbert,—“it is too bad that such a popinjay, such a morris-dancer's shadow, such a scented bale of draper's shreds, as Xavier de Quillac, Marquis de Millepropos, the childish representative of a baby monarch,* should have the *entrée* to our most secret councils, and the power of preventing Time from ever granting us a private moment.”

“Ay, Doge, thou sayest right as to this Millepropos,” replied the chief inquisitor; “but the boy-king's mother is no baby. Catherine de Medici's ‘*divide and govern*,’ may sow dragons' teeth further than France. I like not the *great* Condé's heretical sword; I like not Michel de l'Hôpital, *le Chancelier Vertueux*, as he is called; and for Montmorenci—the poor con-

* Charles IX. of France was then (1561) in his eleventh year.

stable is a mere soldier, and no honest hater of the Huguenots. Then what becomes of us if we offend the Queen?"

"Nay, good Gregorio, there are of your own feather who think Catherine to blame for meddling thus hotly with ecclesiastical affairs—Lainez,* to wit. He would have her leave such matters to the Court of Rome, and Philip of Spain," said Grimani.

"With all due deference to Lainez, he is wrong," said Gregorio, "and Catherine is right. Will not monkeys, foxes, and monsters do as much mischief in destroying the pix, and desecrating our altars, as more noble animals? especially when aided by such a devil-incarnate triumvirate as the King of Navarre, Coligni, and Condé,—to say nothing of d'Andelot, whom if I mistake not, time will prove to be as dangerous as either of the other three; but for the Queen, and the Marechal de Retz, who have both been bred in the proper Florentine school, and know when to keep faith, and when to break it, I doubt our interests would be but badly cared for. Thank heaven! France is *nominally*

* The General of the Jesuits, who affected to treat the Calvinists with contempt, by calling them all monkeys, foxes, and monsters.

swayed by a child, but in *reality* governed—ay, and with a rod of iron too—by a Medici, and that one of the cleverest!”

Here the chief inquisitor's gratulations were interrupted by another knock at the door of the council chamber, rather louder and more assured than the last, and after a speedy permission to enter had been given, the familiar appeared, accompanied by Baptista and Ferrai, whose fears were, however, a little allayed by the pacific appearance of the three formidable powers, in whose presence they now stood. The fact was, as it often falls out among the wisest, the very means they took for coming at the truth, prevented their doing so. Had either of the three interrogated the goldsmith as to his probity in keeping the fabrication of the silver key a profound secret, the disorder and confusion he would have inevitably fallen into must have betrayed his guilt; but being interrogated about a person whose name now for the first time fell upon his ear, so thoroughly reassured him, and gave him such an unimpeachable air of candour and perfect innocence, that it completely baffled the most subtle probings of his interrogators. The Patriarch opened the examination with the following question—

“Honest Master Ferrai, did it ever so fall out

that, in the ordinary plying of your craft, you had any dealings with Spaniards?"

The word Spaniard caused rather an unpleasant tingling in the goldsmith's ears and cheeks; but devoutly believing José Agnado to be in Madrid, for the further tranquillity of his conscience, he considerably antedated his arrival there; and this resource inspiring him with additional courage, he boldly replied—

"Never, your worthiness—that is, never to my knowledge—for *never*, literally, is too wide a word. When I remember the myriads that daily crowd the new bridge, and the hundreds that enter my shop, it may be—for, in responding to your worthiness, I wish to be as near the truth as possible—it may be that, among these hundreds, some may have been from Spain; for a man's country, any more than his calling, is not always writ on his face, though, generally speaking, Nature's hand-writing is legible enough; but, as I was going to observe, I wont say but some of these may have been Spaniards; but they were all such as came for a passing gaud—belike a ring, a dagger, or a cloak clasp—such casual dealers, in fact, that of them I took no note; but regular customers of Spain have I had none, and that I am ready to swear, and, in swearing, can prove it."

“ So far well, and clearly answered,” said the Patriarch.

“ Now remember, honest friend,” interposed the Doge, “ did you never sell—say but a ring with a posy on it—to a Spanish grandee, who was living in marvellous splendour here in Venice some three years ago—one Don Manuel Dragoni by name ?”

“ Dragoni!—Dragoni!” repeated Ferrai, musingly, pinching his under lip—“ ay, now I do remember me to have heard much talk of two things concerning him. One was, that he was about to espouse the Signora Elena Grimani, since married to Count Cappello ; and the other was, that he had lying at Fuzino several large, richly painted, and gilt square boxes on wheels, in which it is said he journeyed from Spain—I think they call them coaches ; but never did he purchase the value of a gazetta from me ; so that I was not sorry when I heard that he had suddenly returned to Spain, on account of his marriage being broken off with the Signora Elena Grimani.”

Here the Doge, the Patriarch, and the Chief Inquisitor, exchanged looks.

“ Do you not remember to have made—” recommenced the Doge, but he was interrupted by the Chief Inquisitor writing on a piece of paper, and passing it to him, these lines :—

“ It is evident Ferrai has no suspicion of the prisoner’s escape ; it will be more prudent, therefore, with due deference to your august opinion, not to put any idea into his head that any one could have succeeded in duping the Republic and the Holy Office, by asking him any questions touching the key that he constructed. I should rather advise finishing with him, and interrogating the other.”

The Doge, appearing to acquiesce in this opinion, passed the paper on to the Patriarch, and changed the form of his question into—
“ You do not, then, remember to have had any dealings with this Don Manuel Dragoni ?”

“ So please you, most worshipful signor, I cannot remember what never occurred, for I never had.”

“ Enough,” said the Doge, turning to Baptista. “ And you, Signor Bonaventuri, know you aught of this Spaniard ?”

“ Worshipful signor,” replied Baptista, “ nothing to his credit—*literally nothing* ; for I do depose, that while in Venice, as your lordship truly says, some three years back, he did live at a great and almost regal cost—more fit for a doge or king than for a mere Spaniard. All his monies did then pass through our hands—and verily the sums were neither few nor rare ; but

it so happened that when he made his sudden flitting into Spain, or wheresoever else he departed to, he quite forgot that he was in our debt two thousand three hundred ducats, which sums to this day remain on our books against him; so if, perchance, *he hath* been guilty of treason, murder, or sacrilege, 'tis but the natural progress from this his first great crime."

The Doge smiled at the usurer's scale of delinquency, as he said—"And this, Signor Bonaventuri, is all that *you* know of this Dragoni?"

"All, most worshipful signor—positively all—and too much too, since we have been such losers by him."

"Enough, sirs—you may both depart; but see that the matter of our conference rest strictly with yourselves."

"Any indiscretion in the way of speech may cost you dear—so remember!" added the Chief Inquisitor, in his most formidable tone.

Baptista and the goldsmith promised silence, even in their own thoughts, by endeavouring to forget that they ever had had the honour of such a conference; after which, they certainly did not "stand upon the order of their going," but went "at once." They walked, or rather ran—even Baptista, heavy laden as he was, contriving

to keep up a sort of galvanic jumping forward—till they came within sight of the Rialto, where Ferrai was the first to stop and take breath; when, bursting into a loud laugh, he said, slapping the old man's shoulder with a violence that nearly endangered his equilibrium—

“Well, old Eldorado, dost think thou hast appetite enough left to discuss a dish of beccaficas, a good melon, and a flask of *vino dolce* for supper to-night?”

“Discuss them!—marry, ay—methinks I could almost pay for them.”

“Nay, by Saint Mark!—for this night thou shalt pay no discount on thy pleasure—so on with thee, and fill that parchment skin of thine at my cost.”

“With pleasure, Master Ferrai—I accept thine hospitality: business takes me for one moment home; but ere the beccaficas can have taken a bird's-eye view of the fire, I will be with thee,” said Baptista, as he hailed a gondola.

CHAPTER XI.

" 'Tis an imposture, my dear," said the master of the inn ;
" 'tis a false nose."

" 'Tis a true nose," said his wife.

" 'Tis made of fir-tree," said he ; " I smell the turpentine."

" There's a pimple on it," said she.

" 'Tis a dead nose," replied the innkeeper.

" 'Tis a live nose ; and if I am alive myself," said the innkeeper's wife, " I'll touch it !"

SLAWKENBERGIUS.

LONG past the noon of a sultry day, two travellers, or, more properly speaking, three (for a dog was of the party), stopped at a miserable *locanda*, on the Bologna road, some ten miles from Florence. The travellers were on foot: the two bipeds in brown woollen pilgrim-dresses, with cords round their waists, shells round their tippets, and sandals on their feet ; while the quadruped was also in a brown coat of Nature's making, and seemed by far the most weary of the three, as he held

his right fore-paw from the ground, and limped forward with his three others. The eldest of the two travellers was a tall, spare, but iron-built man, with a peculiar fierceness in his eyes, considerably augmented by a layer of red ochre, which he had thought fit, for reasons best known to himself, to tint his nose and eyelids with; the other was sallow and languid looking, with large, melancholy eyes. He might have been some ten years younger than his companion, but disease appeared to have outstripped the work of time. In short, not to keep the reader longer without an introduction, the travellers were Ignatius and Don Manuel Dragoni, who had arrived thus far safely on their fugitive journey, which they had not, however, performed all the way, or indeed any considerable part of it, on foot, having two sumpter mules and a muleteer in advance of them, which they had only quitted some three miles before, and now stopped at the *locanda dei tre Delfini*, oppressed by the noonday heat, and attracted by the announcement that appeared under the dying dolphins, of "country and foreign wines," either or both of which they were determined to test before proceeding farther. At the door of the hostelry stood a slipshod woman, her distaff in her hand, bawling, with ear-splitting

shrillness, "O Lord! O Lord!" to three dirty children, who were improving their personal attractions by picking up dirt in the middle of the road; while the master of the establishment was seated within the porch netting a fishing-net and singing an air.

Mine host raised his eyes from his work, with a *Ben venuti, pellegrini* ("Welcome, pilgrims"), as the brothers crossed the threshold, and Ignatius asked for a flask of his best wine:

As the brothers discussed their wine, the landlord, from his seat at the porch (which commanded a full view of the kitchen), ever and anon stole a suspicious glance at them, especially at Ignatius. The fact was, that, in those days, his hostelry, like most places of public resort, was graced with sundry *affiches* of descriptions and rewards for absconded prisoners and criminals; and at the time being he had no less than three such notices hung behind the kitchen-door, which caused him to take particular note of all stray comers and goers; and the incognito of Ignatius's nose and eyelids had more than excited his suspicions; so, after another and more minute glance at his features, he rose to consult the portraitures behind the door, and see what resemblance any of them might have to the individuals before

him ; but alas ! with the best intentions and the strongest inclinations in the world, he could not make out the slightest.

The first the list described was a fat, burly, blear-eyed cobbler, who had made a moonlight move from Fiesole, carrying with him, out of compassion, an orphan donkey, that seemed deserted by its natural protector, and had strayed into his vineyard ; also, by mistake, the frying-pan, and two silver spoons (shovel-shaped, with dwarf-head handles), the property of a neighbouring chesnut-roaster. For the apprehension of this *distrain* gentleman, a reward of thirty florins was offered, upon application to the Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici, or the Prior of the Convent of Carmelites at Fiesole.

The next was out of the question, as it was an offer of a hundred pistoles for the securing and identifying of an old woman, of the name of Giovannina Neri, who had for a long time past exercised the lucrative profession of a witch in the *Via dei Morti* (Street of the Dead), at Florence, but who had suddenly decamped on the night of the 9th, when lo ! two babies in the neighbourhood had, on *that very night* ! died in convulsions ; and a drunken vintner had stumbled down the steps of his own cellar, and broken his neck ; to say nothing of a black cat having

been confined of five kittens, one of which had two heads: all of these catastrophes were attributed to the diabolical sorceries of the said Giovannina Neri—her flight confirming the facts beyond dispute.

The third was a munificent reward of forty francesconi—at least, considering the commodity it was for: to wit, a stripling of seventeen, one Francesco Nicoletti, the son of a respectable mercer, who (as the advertisement set forth) had lately taken to the lordly amusements of making love and wearing red-heeled shoes; and, upon fault being found with the same, had removed himself from the sheltering roof of his father's *magazzino*, leaving his disconsolate parents in total ignorance as to his present whereabouts. The announcement further promised that, would he but return, he should be allowed to wear as many pairs of red-heeled shoes as he pleased, and make love to as many ladies as he could uninterruptedly.

Cesare Cinti, the padrone of the *Tre Delfini*, was turning with a sigh from these particulars, from the conviction that they could possibly have no reference to the two pilgrims, when the bright and consolatory thought struck him that, from the fact of witches being able to assume any form, Ignatius might, and in all probability

was—in short, the case was plain—he *must be*, Giovannina Neri, bearing her misfortunes like a man. No sooner had this bright idea illumined his mind, than, becoming suddenly two inches taller, he laid down his fishing-net, and beckoning his wife into the passage, said, putting both his hands into the pockets of his nether garments, and drawing himself up consequentially—

“Ahem! my dear, do you perceive nothing?”

“No. What should I perceive?” said the good woman, first looking round her in every direction, and then up at the sky; “there is not a cloud in the heavens.”

“Your nose, my dear—consult your nose,” rejoined mine host, mysteriously placing the forefinger of his right hand on the side of his own,—“does your nose perceive nothing?”

“Nothing!” again responded the landlady; and, indeed, considering the *maçédoine* of atrocious odours that organ was habitually regaled upon, it would have been difficult for it to distinguish any additional one, had any such existed.

“Don’t you,” said the innkeeper, “perceive a strong smell of brimstone?”

“No!” again replied the innkeeper’s wife—though this time she sniffed with all her might.

"Come here, then," whispered the inn-keeper, seizing her hand, and leading her behind the kitchen door, where he called her attention to the reward offered for the apprehension of Giovannina Neri—which, though the good woman could not read, she was perfectly acquainted with every syllable it contained, from having had it repeated to her by her vigilant spouse so often.

"Yes, I know, that is all about the witch," said she; "but what of that?"

"What of that!" echoed her husband, holding his own nose with one hand, while he pointed to Ignatius's with the other; "don't you see that nose?"

"To be sure I do," said she; "it is large enough, and red enough to be seen, without requiring a finger-post to point it out."

"Well, that nose is fire and brimstone, as sure as my name is Cesare Cinti!" cried mine host, energetically slapping his right thigh, as if he had proved his discovery beyond all controversy. What, then, was his consternation, when his better half had the temerity to exclaim—

"Fire and fiddlesticks!—'tis as good flesh and blood as your own; and better too, for that matter, for there is more of it; and noses

are like *maccheroni*—their goodness goes by length.”

“I tell you,” persisted Cesare, “that it is an infernal nose, and I smell the brimstone; and that man is no man at all, but Giovannina Neri!”

“Oh, indeed!” said the landlady, with a sneer; “and who then, pray, is the other? and the dog? for, all witch as she is, she could not very well divide herself into three!”

“Much you know about the matter!” said the innkeeper, returning his wife’s sneer with interest. “The other pilgrim is the old *bel-dam*’s familiar, without which she can do none of her incantations; and as for the dog, why—the dog—he is the sorceress’s cat, wrapped up in an honest skin, for travelling;—but there is no use in going into all these particulars, for that nose betrays everything!”

“Then, brimstone or no brimstone!—fire or no fire!—I’ll touch it, and make sure,” said the landlady, throwing down her distaff, putting her arms *a-kimbo*, and boldly marching into the kitchen, before her husband could stop her.

“*Perdona, santo pellagrino*—Pardon, holy pilgrim,” said the hostess, seizing Ignatius’s nose, with force enough to pulverize it, between

her by no means delicate fingers, "but a gnat is about to make free with your nose!"

"That were a trifle, gossip, compared with your remedy," said Ignatius, wiping the tears from his eyes, which the landlady's uncere- monious attack upon the most prominent feature in his face had forced into them.

"See! see!" said the hostess, leaving the pilgrim to his own reflections, and walking triumphantly up to her husband, "my hand is no more burnt than yours!"

"That says nothing," rejoined the uncon- vincible sposo; "witches can make fire feel like ice when it suits them! Besides, just before you seized the nose, I saw the other blow his own nose, which was, no doubt, some spell of the familiar's."

"A very familiar one, truly!" said the wife.

"Ah, well! some people can't believe their own eyes; but that's not *my way* of doing the Grand Duke's business!" said the landlord, strutting up to Ignatius, laying his hand vigorously on the Jesuit's shoulder, but keep- ing a respectful distance from Don Manuel, whom he imagined to be the most formidable personage of the two—inasmuch as the worthy padrone had decided in his own mind that he was the infernal source from whence the

witch's power emanated. "I arrest you, Giovannina Neri," said the landlord, "in the name and by order of Cosimo Primo, and Francesco, his son—for, in spite of your disguise, and change of sex, I know you well! Where are the two dead infants that died in the night?—where is Pietro Corsi, the vintner, who broke his neck at the same time?—ay, marry, and where is your accomplice, the black cat, that brings forth kittens with two heads?—where are they, I say?" thundered Cesare Cinti, concluding, in an awful voice, what he considered to be the appalling list of the sorceress's latest iniquities.

"Good friend," said Ignatius, calmly, shaking off the innkeeper, "it is impossible for me to answer your questions, inasmuch as it is the very first time I ever heard of the subjects of which they treat."

"This is all very fine, old devil's dame!" cried Cesare; "others you may, and no doubt have, circumvented with the like specious speech and deportment; but me you cannot and shall not baffle; for I could smell brimstone even under a pope's tiara, let alone under a pilgrim's shells; so no more stratagems, but budge, I say, and off to Florence with me." And here mine host "suited the action to the word," by dragging Ignatius by the arm.

“ Friend,” rejoined the latter, with the same coolness as before, “ your zeal for catching witches, and ridding Tuscany of the same, does you credit, and deserves that Cosimo Primo should reward you with a grant of horseponds for ten miles round, and an appeal to the Neapolitan government, to grant you a charter in the sulphur mines. But, on the other hand, take heed that your sacrilegious seizure of pious pilgrims, journeying on the business of the Holy See, bring you not into greater peril than the escape of fifty witches !”

“ How am I to know that you are pious pilgrims, journeying on the business of the Holy See ?” said the innkeeper, vacillating not a little in his purpose, at the bare idea that such might in reality be the case.

“ Know you, when you see them, the signs and passes of the Holy Inquisition ?” asked Ignatius, now withdrawing from his girdle, for the first time he had had occasion to use it, the passport of Padre Gregorio.”

“ ’Tis most likely that I do,” said Cesare, with infinite dignity, not liking to own himself ignorant of any matters of state ; although, in reality, never having seen such a thing, he was perfectly aware that he was not competent to detect any imposition, should any be about to be practised upon him.

“ There, then, friend—read that, and satisfy all thy scruples,” said Ignatius, with a smile, as he unfolded the portentous-looking parchment, and placed it in the hands of the innkeeper, who spelt it carefully, overturned it, and re-turned it in every possible direction ; and then holding it closely to his nose, to find whether he could detect any particles of his infallible brimstone, he exclaimed, with a long-drawn breath and dubious shake of the head—

“ Ah, well ! all this certainly *seems* very plausible ; but who can tell ? God and the devil only know whether the power of witchcraft cannot extend *even*—though Heaven forbid !” and here Cesare devoutly crossed himself—“ to forging a *lascia passare* from the Holy Inquisition !”

There is no knowing how mine host might have ultimately decided, whether church-wise or witch-wise ; for while he was still deliberating, a coach drawn by six horses, and driven by two coachmen and two postillions, stopped at the door of the “ *Tre Delfini* ;” but as no modern ideas of carriages and horses can possibly convey any notion of the equipage in question, I will attempt to describe it, from a picture that I have seen of the same. The coach, that now caused such unusual excitement and commotion at the inn, was a very

large, long box, upon wheels, the top of which, save that it was richly carved and gilt, strongly resembled a large raised pie-crust, whose four cupola-raised sides were brought to a focus by a huge gilt rose, which seemed like a sort of handle intended for the convenience of taking the roof off the coach. The panels of this colossal equipage were richly painted and gilt, with a representation of David dancing before the ark ; while at either extremity of each panel there branched forth a massive and richly gilt branch of acanthus. Above the panels, but so far above them as to be quite near the roof of the vehicle, were two largish square windows, and one equally large and equally high up was at the back of the coach. These windows were, as we have before stated, so high, that it was impossible for the persons inside to see out of them into the road or street without standing up for the purpose, so that they only served to admit light and air, while the one that formed the top of the doorway being much lower, and generally left open, allowed the inmates of the vehicle to see and be seen ; who, when they had occasion to descend from the carriage, did so by means of large, fixed, painted wooden steps, like those appended to caravans at modern fairs, which nei-

ther let up nor down. The inside of the coach was lined with crimson velvet, trimmed round with narrow gold lace, but not stuffed ; so, from the hard perpendicular of the sides, there was no temptation to either lounging or repose. The sun was shaded from the windows by draperies of crimson silk, fringed with gold, divided into three, with cords, which pulled up and down by means of another cord, fastened with a pulley at the top. In the right-hand corner of the front seat of the carriage hung a large bronze bell, inlaid with arabesques of silver, and having at the handle a profusion of velvet tassels, also of crimson, intermixed with gold. This bell was in lieu of a modern check-string ; and whenever the occupants desired to stop the coach, it was taken down, and rang outside the window of the door, whereupon the ponderous vehicle immediately stopped. On the box (which was almost as large as a small altar, from which descended a crimson velvet hammer cloth, embroidered in golden *fleurs de lis*) sat two coachmen, in high-pointed (Guy Fawkes shaped) white beaver hats, with a scarlet plume in them, red velvet doublets, with trunk hose slashed with white, red and white ribbed stockings—that is to say, the net-work, that came from the hips downward, and formed the stock-

ings, was red and white; buff leather shoes, with turned-up pointed toes, and silver chains, (which were out of fashion for the higher orders) coming from these points, and fastening like garters round the knee. Over the left shoulder they wore a short, white, camlet cloak, bordered with scarlet, and a cardinal's hat, embroidered in the same colour, on the breast.

One of these charioteers held the reins, or rather, the scarlet and gold ribbons, of the first pair of horses, while the other flourished a long whip over them whenever occasion required it. The postillions, who sat the two leaders, were dressed precisely the same as the two coachmen, while the horses were all six milk-white, with scarlet and gold trappings, and tassels of scarlet and gold dangling over their forehead and eyes, exactly like those to be seen at the present day (only in worsted) worn by the white oxen of Tuscany—those beautiful and classical-looking animals, who seem as if they had just been taken out of the *Eclogues*, and from whose large, brilliant, yet gentle and beautiful eyes, Homer did well to borrow his best compliment to Juno.* At each side of the coach rode two outriders, mounted and dressed like the postillions. No wonder, then, that a

* "Fair, ox-eyed Juno," &c.

cortège so unusual should excite a commotion, somewhat mingled with consternation, among the inmates of the "*Tre Delfini*," especially as the equipage in question was perfectly well known to them as that of the Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici, who was now going to a *fiesta* at one of the villas of Lucas Pitti, a descendant of the lawless (and protector of the lawless) Lucas Pitti of 1463, though, of all his grandfather's propensities, he merely retained his love of pleasure and of splendour. The Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici was accompanied by the gonfalonière, Martin Bernardini,—a saturnine-looking personage, whose haughty bearing and imperious lip was just what might be expected from one who had excluded from office every man who had not an hereditary share in the sovereignty of the Florentine republic. The occasion of the stoppage of these great personages at so mean an hostelry was, that one of the leaders had cast a shoe. No sooner had the first great excitement of this arrival subsided, than Cesare and his wife returned to the kitchen of their inn.

"What great personage have we here, friend?" asked Ignatius, as the landlord re-entered the kitchen.

"You have a right to ask," replied the other,

surlily, "for it concerns you; as we shall soon see if his Eminence the Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici cannot tell a true *lascia passare* of the Holy Inquisition from the sorceries of a witch."

"We shall see," responded Ignatius, with a smile, "and the sooner we see the better." And so saying, to the landlord's infinite surprise, he walked boldly forward to the door of the inn, beckoning to his brother to follow, Cesare and his wife bringing up the rear, anxious to see the result of the supposed witch's temerity.

Ignatius crossed himself, as he descended the four broken steps that led from the porch of the hostelry into the road, and muttered part of a prayer in Latin.

"Ay, that is all very fine," said the landlord, pushing on before the pilgrims, till he reached the coach door, cap in hand; "but as we know that the devil can quote Scripture, that says nothing; so now for it! Please your Eminence," said Cesare, with ten scrapes of his right foot to every bow of his head—"on the night of the ninth, there did escape from the Via dei Morti, at Florence, a notorious sorceress, one Giovannina Neri, committing divers foul *murthers* on the night of her flight, and leaving a black cat to bring forth devils, instead of kittens.

Now, so please your Eminence, for the last nine days the authorities have been seeking, but vainly seeking, for the hag—I say vainly—for it was reserved for me, under Providence, to detect, under the holy semblance of a pilgrim, the infernal reality of a witch. And”—here mine host, perceiving that Ignatius was calmly unfolding his passport, with the same provoking smile he had preserved all along, suddenly exclaimed, “Oh yes!” may it please your Eminence, I forgot to say that this diabolical old woman has actually carried dæmoncraft so far as to pretend she is in possession of a *lascia passare* from the Holy Inquisition.”

“How is this, brothers?” said the Cardinal, with a smile, addressing the pilgrims. “I am no great believer in witches, beyond the witch of Endor: say, dost thou trace thy genealogies in that line? and what means honest Master Vintner here, by your being in possession of a *lascia passare* from the Holy Office? for that I should have thought would smoothe all difficulties, as they are not likely to grant the same to witches and sorcerers. Expound this matter to us, holy pilgrims.”

“May it please your Eminence, the argument lies thus,” said Ignatius. “I am, in truth, a member of the order of Loyola, but having

been in the Holy Land, I prefer using my pilgrim's garb for journeying ; inasmuch as that I have hitherto found it ensure me more of way-faring hospitality than any other ; however, not so in the instance of mine host here, who being fully possessed with, or by, the aforesaid Giovannina Neri, has thought fit so to incorporate her with me, and me with her, that despite the *lascia passare* I hold from the Padre Gregorio's own hand, who is, as your Eminence well knows, chief of the Holy Office at Venice, I had been, but for your timely arrival, through the over-zeal of our honest friend here, well nigh perilled in a jeopardy that, notwithstanding my imputed skill in dæmonology, I might have found it difficult to extricate myself from, at least under the ordeal of a couple of horse-ponds."

"Which proves," said the Cardinal, as he extended his hand for the passport of the Inquisition, which Ignatius proffered him, "that it is indeed an ill wind, as the proverb hath it, that blows nobody good ; for had not one of my cattle chanced to lose a shoe, you might have lost your liberty."

"True, your Eminence," replied Ignatius, who carefully perused the Cardinal's open and pleasant countenance, as he looked over the *lascia passare*.

While the Jesuit was so employed, Martin Bernardini, the gonfalonière, was not idle in the minute scrutiny he was bestowing upon Ignatius's face, and the sort of inventory he appeared to be taking of him. Nor were the host and hostess without their share of interest in the scene, entertaining, as we have before stated, a truly conjugal diversity of opinion touching the pilgrim's identity, and, in consequence, harbouring a very differently directed anxiety concerning the Cardinal's decision as to the authenticity of the *lascia passare* of the Holy Inquisition — Cesare standing with his hands out, like a person playing at blindman's buff, his head forward, and his mouth open, as if holding himself in readiness not only to swallow the order for the pilgrim's arrest, but zealously resolved upon swallowing the pilgrim himself — while his better-half stood with her arms tightly folded, and an incipient smile of triumph playing round her compressed lips, coupled with a "*You'll find I am right*" sort of expression irradiating her whole face.

In less time than it has taken us to describe the respective positions of the *dramatis personæ*, the Cardinal returned the passport to Ignatius, saying it was perfectly correct; merely adding, "Doubtless, the other pilgrim is the

Benedictine, your fellow-traveller, set down in the passport?" To which Ignatius having answered in the affirmative, his Eminence motioned to the now trembling Cesare to approach.

"Hark'ee, friend!" said the Cardinal, holding the *lascia passare* (which he had again taken out of the Jesuit's hand) closely to his eyes,—"look well at this parchment, that you may know it when you see another; for it is a serious matter to dispute the authority of the church; and should it happen again, a worse chance may befall thee than this slight reprimand, which we are now fain to let thee depart with, in consideration of thy zeal to serve the state."

With a hundred bows, and as many vain attempts at muttering his thanks, the abashed vintner slunk into the house, followed by his wife, who, no doubt, with the laudable humility of wishing to arrive at the same opinion as the superior being, her husband, kept repeating, "How strong the brimstone smells, doesn't it, my dear?"

"Ah, well! we shall see," said Cesare, sulkily, not choosing to succumb before his wife, whatever he might do before a Cardinal—"We shall see!—all's not ended that seems so. And then the beast casting a shoe, and all!"

“Why, what of that?” said the wife.

“What of that! only that any one who knows anything—but to be sure, some people know nothing,—knows that horse-shoes are the very ramparts of witchcraft!” cried mine host.

“Against it, I have always understood, or else why nail them on every barn door?” replied the landlady.

“Ay, for or against, ’tis all the same thing,” logically argued her sposo, “and whoever gets the horse-shoe is on the safe side of the hedge. Now what I maintain is, that the sorceress must have picked up the shoe of the Cardinal’s horse as she came along, and so has contrived to bamboozle church, cardinal, gonfalonière, and all—all but Cesare Cinti,—who, perhaps, can see further into a millstone than most people.”

“That is quite impossible, my dear!” said the innkeeper’s wife, “utterly impossible, that the witch, supposing her to be the pilgrim, could have picked up the Cardinal’s horse-shoe, when he was coming from Florence and she from Bologna, two opposite directions.”

“My dear, you talk like a fool!” said the affectionate husband; “witches have cross roads at their command, which bring all roads to the same point.”

This was a piece of geographical information so conclusive, that the wife was left without an answer. So, like a skilful general, she immediately changed her position, and they began to fall out about which should receive the pilgrim's, or, as mine host persisted in calling him, the witch's reckoning ; to settle which knotty point we will leave them, and return to the group we left at the inn door.

As everything in Italy was, and is, a work of time, the Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici had to wait patiently (or it might be impatiently) for a full hour, ere the smith appeared to replace the shoe which one of his horses had lost ; and after he did appear, another half hour elapsed ere the animal was shod. During this period, the gonfalonière, who had never taken his eyes off Ignatius, seeing the latter about to re-enter the hostelry, under the pretext of wearying of the confinement of the carriage, got out, and followed him into the house.

"I think, holy brother," said he, gently holding him back, as Ignatius was about to enter the kitchen, "that you mentioned having received your *lascia passare* from Padre Gregorio, the chief inquisitor at Venice, from which I augur that you are lately from thence ?"

"Even so," replied the Jesuit, laconically and

cautiously, as in his turn he scanned the gonfalonière from head to foot, not exactly knowing toward what point his interrogations might tend ; not that he felt any alarm for his personal safety, as he was well aware that the Florentine Republic piqued itself upon a total, nay, almost hostile independence of Venice, the proof of which was, that Florence at that period was the refuge, and her government the protectors, of every Venetian rebel or refugee who sought a shelter or a sanctuary. He also knew that a nod from Philip of Spain had more weight with the Medici than the whole of the triple dynasty of Venice combined, ecclesiastical, aristocratic, and commercial. But in times when men, however high their position in the state, or great their stake in the country, were daily in the habit of betraying the one and risking the other, in order often to grasp at the most vague and chimerical phantoms of personal aggrandizement that ambition could conjure up, there was no knowing what snares they might spread to entrap the unwary into their schemes, leaving them as scapegoats to incur the difficulty and the danger, while they alone reaped the glory and the emolument.

“ I think,” resumed Martin Bernardini, nothing daunted by the reserve of Ignatius’s man-

ner—"I think you also mentioned your being a member of the new order of Loyola?"

"I am proud to say I am," was the brief reply.

"But Venice—Venice," resumed the gonfalonière, musingly, as if speaking his own thoughts aloud; and then added, directly addressing the Jesuit—"Knew you aught, while in that city, of one Giovanni Ferrai, a goldsmith?"

"His calling has little to do with mine," replied Ignatius.

"And—and," resumed the gonfalonière, following out his own train of thinking, and apparently unmindful of the unsatisfactory reply he had received—"he has a wife?"

"*Had*, I believe, some sixteen years ago," said Ignatius, answering more to the point, now that he, with his usual quickness of apprehension, perceived that Martin Bernardini's questions could have no reference to him or his brother; but, on the contrary, that it was evident he required his services, at least his information, on business of his own; and no one knew how to dispose of either services or information on more advantageous terms than Ignatius Dragoni; so, looking carefully round, with the air of a man who felt his protection

and assistance were required, and who upon certain conditions was willing to bestow them—
 “It strikes me, Monsignore,” said he, assuming an air of confidential importance, well calculated to have its weight with an anxious mind, as Bernardini’s evidently was—“it strikes me,” said he, drawing the gonfalonière aside, “that for the sort of questions you would ask, and that I may have it in my power to answer, this is no place. Florence is my present destination; I shall sojourn in that city for some time; would it not be more suitable to give me a meeting at your own house?—or if you object to that, there is as much privacy as the most discreet can desire in the cloisters of Santa Croce; but in the event of that not chiming in with your wishes, I shall be to be found at the house of my sister, the Signora della Torre, Casa Bondi, Piazza del Duomo.”

“You are right!” said Martin Bernardini, who was not slow in detecting in Ignatius the talent for intrigue which he possessed, and which was precisely the sort of talent he wished at the time being to avail himself of—“You are right! Be at the Palazzo Vecchio an hour after sunset to-morrow; and, can you give me the information I require, you will find that you have not bestowed it on an ungrateful person.”

“ Bene, bene,” nodded the Jesuit, with the air of a money-changer, who attached no other meaning to the word gratitude than a full equivalent for *value received*. Here one of the outriders came to inform the gonfalonière that the horse was shod, and the Cardinal ready to proceed; so nodding hastily to Ignatius, he quitted the inn, and resumed his seat in the ponderous vehicle, which then moved slowly on, much after the fashion of a colossal tortoise; not but what the six horses and four drivers could have impelled it at a much greater speed; but the conveyance having no springs, its conductors exercised a proper discretion over the bones of its occupants.

No sooner had Bernardini departed, than Ignatius flung a florin down on the table, to pay for the wine he had had, the landlady preparing to give him the change, which he declined. This circumstance, coupled with his conference with the gonfalonière, so raised him in the landlord's estimation, that just as he had his foot on the threshold to depart, mine host stepped up to him with an humble apology for having so widely mistaken so worthy a personage.

“ Oh, no offence, friend,” said Ignatius—“ no offence; on the contrary, I return you my

thanks, for we all like to find ourselves in the right, which you have proved me to be; for while you mistook me for a witch, I had more wit, and guessed the truth at once, by taking you for a fool!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the landlady of the "*Tre Delfini*," louder than any one; while her lord and master commenced a rural excursion to the poultry-yard, by the medium of a back door.

Meanwhile the brothers pursued their road to Florence, the elder making not a little merry at the notion of his late adventure, till they overtook the muleteer, with their two mules, which Ignatius thought it advisable to mount, as their lengthening shadows gave notice of the decline of day. As they entered Florence, the bells of the Duomo and of San Gaetano rang out a noisy peal, that precluded all further conversation. The church-bells having at length subsided, and no sounds louder being heard than the equal footfalls of their own mules, echoed as they were by the gentle chime of their bells, Ignatius burst into (for him) an unusually joyous laugh.

"Thou art merry, brother," said Don Manuel, in a pensive tone.

"Ay, merry am I," replied Ignatius, "to

think that here we are, safe and well, within the iris-crowned walls of fair Florence,—although I am on my way to see a dying friend—ha! ha! ha!

“What mean you, brother?” said Manuel, in a more melancholy tone than before,—“is it seemly to laugh when one’s friends are dying?”

“Sometimes,” replied Ignatius, evidently still chuckling over his own thoughts; “especially when one has a good chance of making them laugh too. I told thee before, brother, that in order to obtain that said *lascia passare*, which has this very day done us such good service, I was obliged to place my worthy friend, Stefano Antinori, the Superior of Santa Maria Novella, at the point of death; so I think it but decent, having brought him to this pass, to go and see how it fares with him. Therefore, while I hie me thither, go thou to our sister, who will be glad enough to see thee in the land of the living; and tell her, that before ye have got through half your respective greetings and histories, I will return to benefit by the recital. There, yonder stands the house!”

After which, Ignatius pursued his way straight on to the Via della Scala, till he arrived at

the monastery of Santa Maria Novella ; which was situated then exactly where it now is, with this difference—that the doorway, which now opens into the *farmacia* of the convent, was in those days a massive iron portal, opening with a turnstile into a large court, which is now occupied by the passage and small ante-room leading to the large laboratory, which was then used as a refectory.

No sooner had the door turned on its giant hinges, in answer to the sonorous appeal Ignatius had made to the bell, than he crossed the threshold, just in time to meet all the monks coming out of the chapel from vespers, on their way to the refectory, where supper awaited them—a ceremony at which their devotions were at least not likely to relax. So usual and ordinary an occurrence as the arrival of a dusty and travel-worn pilgrim to share their hospitality, could not even excite a momentary remark, as they passed on intently to the last meal they were to discuss that day. A fat monk still lingered near the lustral, and having dipped in his finger, extended, previous to crossing himself, the reversionary particle of holy water to Ignatius, who accepted it with a “*pax vobiscum*,” and walked on till he reached the refectory, where the large silver

lamps were but just lighted, and as yet shed but a partial and uncertain light upon the crowd of white-robed monks, who flitted with rather more bustle and noise than spirits,—whose vestments, in the dim, uncertain light, their snowy garments might have represented,—to the different tables, which now groaned and smoked under a profusion of very substantial fare. At the centre table were already seated its respective occupants, quietly arranging their napkins under their chins, in deliberate preparation for the important business of the evening. This table, as well as those down the sides of the room, were covered with large, saucer-shaped, gaudily-painted dishes and plates, of a thick, enamelled sort of delf, now known by the name of Raphael china; each monk had a high silver drinking-cup, bearing, from non-cleaning, the same strong family likeness to lead that the Italian plate of the present day does, from the self-same cause. Upon the ground, between every three monks, stood a large, red, two-handled earthen vase of wine, and another of water. The novice whose week it was to read during meals, had just ascended the pulpit. The Superior, Stefano Antinori, a hale, ruddy looking man, of about forty, had seated himself, with the confessor of the con-

vent and three of the elder members of the fraternity, at his own table at the upper end of the refectory, which was distinguished from the others by a whiter cloth, and the plate on which the viands were served; and when seated, the whole assemblage, on a signal from the Superior, again rose, to chant the grace—which on that evening consisted of the two first verses of the “*Dominus regit me*”—the last sonorous cadence of which had died away, when Ignatius walked up to the Superior’s table, who was just about to ascertain the merits of a red mullet, luxuriantly embedded in a sauce that seemed in every way worthy of it, when Ignatius laid his hand upon his shoulder. Stefano Antinori started; but the “*How! Dragoni!*” which escaped him, as he turned round and laid down his knife and spoon, had to the full as much pleasure in it as surprise.

But this was not to be wondered at; the Jesuits—then having weathered their natal struggles with Paul and his successors, from the implicit obedience and submission instilled into them by their military founder—were now in the zenith of their power—a power, the strength of which was derived from its universality; for courts, camps, the church, and com-

merce—which was the very thew and sinew of the sixteenth century—were equally under their guidance and control. Their ostensible province, as the guides and preceptors of youth, coupled with their being the chosen confessors of every catholic sovereign and potentate in Europe—a function of no small importance under the ablest monarch, but under weak ones conferring a power infinitely beyond the nominal prerogatives of the crown and the minister; especially as, in addition to this, they were the spiritual guides of every individual of any eminence, either in rank, wealth, or talent; so that the high degree of confidence and interest they possessed at the papal court, as the zealous champions of its authority, followed as a matter of course. That such unlimited power, entrusted to human hands, and subject to the corruption of human hearts, should have been, and was, often abused, can be a matter of no surprise; particularly when it is remembered, that they mingled in *all* affairs, and took part in every intrigue and revolution throughout Europe.

But to return :—The lamps in the refectory of Santa Maria Novella were now fully lighted, and shed a brilliant light upon the busily employed monks, and their white garments and black hoods.

“Welcome! thrice welcome, brother, to our board again!” said Stefano Antinori, as he made way on the bench for Ignatius to place himself beside him—“the more so, that we feared, from your long tarrying, that in an evil hour you had shared your brother’s fate at Venice.”

“Ha! ha! ha!—and so I most certainly should have done, had you not had the complaisance to start for the other world, in order to see me safely out of Venice—ha! ha! ha!”

And here the Jesuit related the trick he had put upon Padre Gregorio, the liberty he had taken with his friend Stefano’s health and life, the manner in which he had effected his brother’s and his own escape, and all the details of his journey; not forgetting Cesare Cinti’s compliment of taking him for a witch, the Cardinal Ferdinando de Medici’s opportune advent at the “Tre Delfini,” and, finally, his own and his brother’s safe arrival at Florence; whereat the good Prior laughed till the tears rolled down his cheeks, and sundry particles of a *risotta* that he had been discussing fell upon his large gold cross and crimson ribbon, and had to be wiped away; then he filled a goblet of rare Malvoisie, and drank to Don Manuel’s safe escape; then another to his own miraculous recovery from the jaws of death;—and here he again laughed so

heartily, that he had to hold his sides, as the tears continued to fall from his round, merry, brown, twinkling eyes; which exhausting process he recruited by filling another bumper to the safe return of Ignatius, and another to his *donna incognita*, Signora Giovannina Neri!— And here, with a concluding laugh, and an approving re-echoing smack of the lips, Stefano Antinori finally laid down his goblet, as he said to Ignatius, in an under voice—

“And now, brother, after all these perils and dangers, I suppose you are come to remain amongst us?”

“Only for a time,” replied the Jesuit, “for my master has work for me at the court of France. We like not the victories of Condé and Coligni. Heresy, rank heresy, sprouts with all its laurels, and the Queen is but lukewarm in the cause of the church. Her opposition to the Huguenots is neither vigorous nor genuine; she thinks too much of the state, and too little of religion, forgetting that the one hinges upon the other. Her maxim of ‘*divide and govern*’ is a dangerous innovation, especially for one who at times is more of the woman than the queen. Catherine de’ Medici must be looked to, Stefano. De Retz is our only stronghold against a host of evil; and it is to be feared that even when it is

concluded, which it now must soon be, the Council of Trent, from political motives, will not be acknowledged in France.* King Philip has it in embryo—but, like all his plans, it will take a long time to mature—that his queen, accompanied by one of our longest heads, the Duke of Alba, should meet her baby-brother at Bayonne. When this takes place, I must be there also; for, no doubt, Catherine de' Medici will be with her son. I have an offering preparing for her. You know Maximus Theophilus's† new Bible? Well, it is splendidly illuminated, and I am having it cased in the rarest filigree that your most skilful Florentine craftsmen can fabricate of gold and precious stones, and I mean it should be the gift of Cosimo. By the way, how fares he?—does he still persist in his indolent relinquishment of all politics and ambition?”

“Ay, truly does he; he has subsided into a mere artisan, labouring, as though it were for his daily bread, at that new-fangled invention of

* The Council of Trent, which was terminated in 1563, was not received in France, from the fact of many of its canons of discipline being contrary to the French laws and political code.

† Maximus Theophilus, a Benedictine monk, dedicated a new Italian version of the Bible, in 1551, to Francesco de' Medici.

his that they call *pietra dura*, and leaving all the toils of government to the Archduke Francesco, who thinks more of pleasure than of policy, and far more of a peasant girl's beauty than of a Pope's bull."

"Ha!—all that may be turned to account," said Ignatius, musingly; and then added aloud, "Well, well, all these are adverse matters, and shew the peril the church is in, which makes it incumbent on her sons to labour in her cause the more indefatigably. But I have toiled wearily all the day," continued the Jesuit, rising, and resuming his staff, preparatory to his departure, "and this frail tenement of clay has its claims, which must be attended to, in order that it hinder not the spirit from its better work."

So saying, he shook Stefano Antinori cordially by the hand, as he bade him farewell; and the next moment the gaunt figure of Ignatius Dragoni was wending its way, through the dark and narrow streets of Florence, to his sister's house.

END OF VOL. I.

BIANCA CAPPELLO.

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

BY

LADY LYTTON BULWER,

AUTHOR OF "CHEVELEY."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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BIANCA CAPPELLO.

**" A woman's fate lies in a cloud
'Twixt heaven and earth."**

UNPUBLISHED PLAY.

" There is a lesson in every life, and warning in too many."

***Capt. Maryatt's* POOR JACK.**

BIANCA CAPPELLO.

CHAPTER I.

"The pulse of the heart is the voice of fate."

SCHILLER.

"Here will be an old abusing of God's patience and the king's English."—SHAKESPEARE.

"Life's winter now with double smart,
Sheds frost upon my head and heart;
And thus I stand a lonely tree,
All base and desolate to see,
But worse within."

HORNE'S BALLAD OF DELORA.

TIME is a chivalric brigand, who takes from the rich to give to the poor, and yet like a true highwayman as he is, often for the sake of his *métier*, robs rich and poor indiscriminately. It was six months since we left him in Venice, having made free with the mortal existence of Pierio Valeriano Bolzanio, which event had shut out from Bianca Cappello and her lover

one of their principal places of meeting ; still, in Love's politics, resource is the *primum mobile*, and he was not long in supplying the deficiency.

Arianna had been gone some three months to Ferrara with the Contessa Incredia D'Este, a change which had taken place quite unknown to Vittorio Cappello, who always imagined her a close prisoner in her room for the sake of avoiding his presence, a supposition so irritating to his vanity, that he passed the chief part of his time in maturing schemes of future vengeance against her. The loss of Arianna's faithful companionship, coupled with a continued nervous anxiety about her secret meetings with Bonaventuri, had a visible effect upon the health and looks of Bianca, which sensibly affected the old Count her father, who nevertheless having the fear of his wife continually before his eyes, had no other mode of evincing his increased tenderness, than by heaping rich gifts upon his daughter, to whom they were only so many silent reproaches that served but to increase the melancholy he sought to dissipate. Not so Bonaventuri, he looked upon the sparkling gems and costly jewels of the beautiful Bianca as so many sources of their future existence ; an idea, however, which he was careful to keep to himself, while he was openly lavish of his admiration of the becoming

lustre they imparted to attractions that needed not their aid, so as to give her a liking for them that she would not otherwise have had.

Among the many heavy and galling taxes and imposts of guilt, there is none like the nervous fever of constant concealment, and its accompanying fear of detection. So severely did Bianca suffer from this, that she as often wished that her lover would urge her to end it by flight, as wondered that he did not do so.

At length time shook from his fate-fraught sands the eventful thirteenth of December, 1561*, upon which Bonaventuri had arranged every thing for his elopement with Bianca. The night had been clear and cold—the stars looked out from their eternal home—every wind was hushed—and that fearful silence reigned around, which from its intensity seems almost audible, as Cappello's daughter sat long after midnight in the splendid room that she was to occupy for the *last time in her father's house*, awaiting her lover and her fate, and listening to the fearful beatings of her own heart, which was the only living thing near her—for even her poor little dogs she had taken leave of early in the

* Some histories date Bianca Cappello's elopement from Venice on the thirteenth of December, 1563 ; but the most authentic, according to other epochs of comparison in the history of the times, concur in placing it at 1561.

evening, and consigned to Ghiriluzzo, lest their barking should give the alarm. On the toilette table lay several caskets of jewels directed to her father, as she could not bear to carry with her those mementoes of his kindness and her own ingratitude; also a letter to her tirewoman, Cattina, which she had written in the hope of exonerating the latter from having had any share in her departure, and knowing that every instrument of vengeance would be set at work the moment her flight was discovered; she had moreover, for the better execution of her scheme, affected a slight indisposition, and kept her room for the last two days, which would allow the poor girl some little time to decide upon the best method of breaking the intelligence of her mistress' departure.

All these arrangements concluded, then came the solemn and fearful pause—devoid of all the “pomp and circumstance” of preparation, that buoys up the vacillating spirit into setting its fate upon *the* cast of life from which there is no appeal—Bianca sat cold, but not motionless, as a statue, tremblingly contemplating, for *the first time*, the fearful precipice, to the very brink of which she had now approached. Her lover no longer knelt before her; his voice no longer stole upon her ear,

filling her soul with those honied fallacies that lull a woman's heart into life's first and last *dream*, the awakening from which is *death*! The veil was rent—the illusion was vanished—all was now *reality*!—and what is reality ever on this side of the grave, at least to a woman, but stern unbending misery? And the bitter truth now overshadowed Bianca's heart, that she was fulfilling her sex's destiny, and sacrificing *all* to convert herself into a short-lived toy for the gratification of man's colossal selfishness, that would share the fate of all toys, and be cast aside despised and neglected, as soon as it had been destroyed for the pleasure of its owner.

At that moment she loved, or thought she loved (and in metaphysics reality and imagination are synonymous), her father better than she had ever done before; the little demonstrations of kindness which he had evinced towards her lately, seemed to her excited feelings an arrear of affection that out-weighed the indifference of years, and even the small envyings and jealousies that had subsisted between her and her cousins were now merged in the one feeling of regret at the idea that she perhaps might never see them more! Then her aunt, their mother Elena Gritti, had always been so kind to her; and all their little feuds, if feuds they could be called, had arisen out of

what they had considered on her part as a monopoly of their mother's affection. And though last not least, she was about to leave Venice, from which she knew she should be for ever banished, and the love of country in the heart of a Venetian in those days, was a sort of sacred home and domestic feeling seldom eradicated but with life. This last thought overpowered her, and she burst into tears, which flowed all the faster from the reflection that they were the last she should shed in the home of her youth.

Had it depended upon her at that moment, she would have renounced Bonaventuri ; but she had placed her fate beyond her own control, and the next instant she was roused to a full conviction of this by the almost inaudible sound of a muffled oar, followed by the slow and stealthy opening of the casement, which gradually widening, her lover stood before her. For a few seconds his pantomimic consolations, which he dared not trust to words, had no effect in calming her, and with a strong tincture of petty curiosity, which was the only thing in his whole bearing that might have betrayed his plebeian origin, he walked to the toilette table to examine its contents. The billet to Cattina he left where it was ; but from the caskets he removed the directions to Count Cappello, and hastily looking round the room

(to ascertain that Bianca did not perceive the act, which she did not, her face being buried in her hands), he concealed them under his cloak, a circumstance which he had the address at a future period to persuade her had arisen out of his wish never to see her less splendidly attired than when he had first known her.

These hasty arrangements completed, he returned to Bianca, and placing his arm round her waist, used a gentle force to raise her from her chair, whispering in her ear with the persuasive tones of that voice, which to her had never pleaded in vain, that the moments were precious, and that their very existence depended upon their making no unnecessary delays; her head sank upon his shoulder, she suffered herself to be led unresistingly away—the next moment she was without the window, her foot on the first step of the rope ladder that hung from the balcony, while Gaetano, Bonaventuri's servant (and the only person in his confidence on the occasion), held the other end of the ladder below in the gondola. Bianca descended, or rather was carried down, almost in a state of insensibility, from which she was only aroused by the clock of the Church of San Giorgio Maggiore striking the half hour after midnight. It sounded like the knell of departing happiness to her, and was echoed by a shudder

through her heart ; but when the now waning and watery-looking moon cast its faint ghost-like light upon the ducal palace as the gondola shot swiftly and noiselessly past it, her grief burst the boundaries of fear and found vent in words.

“ Oh, God ! ” she exclaimed, clasping her hands, “ what will become of me ? My country ! my dear country ! I have lost you for ever ! and ye, old palace walls, that have contained so much glory and so much honour, never again shall I breathe proudly within ye, at the recollection that I was born a member of the patrician family of the first city of Italian liberty ! ”

Bonaventuri had sufficient tact not to attempt to console her, at least by words, which are but mockeries to great griefs. The moon was now entirely hidden, the rain began to fall in large drops, and the heralds of the coming storm every moment became louder and darker. The wind had at first blown lightly to the westward, and then had been hushed altogether, had within the last half hour shifted to the north-east, and continued every instant to increase in violence, which was evinced by the small white foam with which every wave was bordered as it rolled shoreward, and the deepening lurch and strain of the gondolas and other small craft riding

in the harbour. The night had been starry and cloudless, but as the sun neared the east, the western quarter of the heavens became dense with a lurid haze, which rose like a vague prophecy of evil from out the waters and stretched itself gradually onwards towards the land, tinging the sea with a murky brown, and leaving only one narrow streak of white running along the line of its distance, in which, as if touched by a faint gleam of light, might be descried the far off sails of many anxiously watched fishing boats, whose fragile timbers seemed struggling fitfully and at fearful odds with the turbulent element that appeared every moment on the point of engulfing them.

Every one knows the power which even the most trifling external circumstances possess of casting shadow or sunshine over the mind at particular periods or crisis of our lives. I have seen one man whose fate hovered between the dark meshes and incertitudes of the law, raised from "the slough of despond" and become buoyant and sanguine for four-and-twenty hours, from the trivial coincidence of the last letter the post brought him, bearing the maker's name of HOPE in the water mark; while another heart has been wrung with agony, while driving with some dearly loved invalid, by the equally accidental occurrence of the

latter mistaking a cemetery for a garden, commenting on its beauty, and coveting its possession ! yet in both instances, the *hope* of the one proved as unfounded as the *fear* of the other. What wonder, then, that Bianca's heart quailed beneath the elemental storm that greeted her first unhallowed step in a world, of which she had hitherto only known the golden side. The thunder, so unusual at that time of the year, and rendered doubly awful by the booming and giant echoes the sea from its uttermost depths returned of every peal, seemed like the living voice of God denouncing her disobedience—and the lurid lightning, that every moment steeped the sky in its fitful light, like the flaming sword of his vengeance gleaming before her.

“For mercy's sake, let us return !” she murmured, as she buried her face on her lover's shoulder, in the vain hope of trying to exclude the sound and sight of the storm.

“To return, dearest, is impossible,” said Bonaventuri, “and if I would leave you, my heart would not let me—and in it cannot you find a shelter from worse storms than this?” added he, pressing her closely to it—“Ah, what a difference is there in our love!—with you beside me, I prefer this raging of the elements to the most halcyon calm and brightest sun

that ever shone ; but this is but natural—I gain *all* in you—you *lose* all for me !”

A woman’s generosity is never appealed to in vain—at least when she loves. Bianca returned the pressure of her lover’s hand as she drank in his honied sophistries—whispered that their love *was equal*—and whatever she might feel, expressed no more fears of the storm or wishes to return. After having been driven some two or three miles out of their course, they at length made Fuzino, where they landed completely drenched with one of the angry elements they had encountered, and where Bonaventuri had secured the attendance of a priest from Padua, not so much, it must be confessed, from a purely honourable or delicate feeling towards the high-born girl he had allured into so fatal and degrading a step, as from the idea that, by making her instantaneously and irrevocably his, he should in a great measure invalidate the edicts that the Venetian States (urged on by her powerful and outraged relations) would be sure to issue against him—but in this calculation he was mistaken.

In a small and half ruined chapel, where from damp and neglect a mossy mantle was beginning to overspread the marble effigies of the long sleeping dead—and before a small

altar, that had erst belonged to a Temple of Bacchus, and still retained around it the goats-head sluices through which had flowed so many purple tides of heathen sacrifices, but on which now appeared a silver crucifix, two mass books, a chalice, and a bible, and above which swung a small silver Greek lamp, giving out a feeble, fitful, and uncertain light, which made the surrounding desolation more desolate, Bianca Cappello knelt, and not without trepidation pronounced the irrevocable monosyllable that sealed her fate !

“How is this ?” said the Priest, after he had pronounced the benediction, turning to Gaetano, “here is but one witness—’tis but a sorry bridal that cannot furnish two.”

“Nay, the sorrow shall not be for want of witnesses !” said a low, solemn, but mellow voice. At that moment a vivid flash of lightning illumined the little chapel, and there was seen standing beside the altar a tall figure muffled in a dark cloak, a drooping plume of black feathers in his cap, which partially concealed his pale but handsome features, yet left them sufficiently developed for Bonaventuri to recognize those of Magini the Astrologer, who however made a sign to him that he did not choose to be publicly acknowledged, and advancing to the altar, took the pen that Gaetano

had just laid down, and inscribed his name within the book as a witness to the marriage rites that had just taken place—then drawing on his black gauntlet, he strode up the aisle, merely saying to Bonaventuri as he passed—

“On! on! to Verona! remember, *time is fate!*” And the next moment he was lost in the surrounding gloom.

“Who is that strange being,” tremblingly inquired Bianca, “who has come like a bird of night with his black and evil croaking? Did you not mark, dearest, that he said we should not *want witnesses to our sorrow?*”

“Nay—nay, sweet dunce, thou hast thy lesson badly; and I were but half a husband did I neglect the noble art of chiding whenever a reasonable, or for that matter unreasonable, opportunity occurred. He said the sorrow of our bridal should not spring from want of witnesses.”

“Well, ’tis much the same meaning, however the words may differ; and I defy all the sophistry of the schools to disentangle it,” said Bianca with a sigh.

“Tush!” said Bonaventuri, as he threw his arm round her waist and drew her gently forward, imprinting at the same time some half dozen kisses on her beautiful but now pale lips, “I pretend not to more logic than can dis-

entangle a kiss from a sigh ; but all is ready for our onward journey, and to tarry here is to tempt the sorrow thy fancy hath conjured up."

"Still thou hast not answered me, Pietro. Who was that strange being who was here anon, and who came and went like a shadow? I know not why—but I feel as if he boded us no good."

"Thou art mistaken, sweet, he hath boded us much good ; but we can discuss him on our road to Verona."

Without the little chapel at Fuzino, a ponderous vehicle, drawn by eight mules, and about the dimensions, though not half the splendour of the one we have already described as belonging to the Cardinal Ferdinando de Medici, awaited the fugitives, into which Bonaventuri now hurried his bride, and which then moved ponderously on, like a large fragment of the world itself receding from its parent earth, yet rumbling and bemoaning its flight, as it were, every step it advanced. Here we will leave the lovers to pursue their journey, while we return to Venice—it may be for the last time.

It was evening before Cattina summoned sufficient courage to announce to Count Cappello the sad intelligence of his daughter's flight. He was sitting in the large saloon con-

versing with his wife and the Patriarch, which latter had just inquired if he could not see Bianca, and been informed by her father that indisposition confined her to her room, when a page entered saying that Cattina, the Signorina's tirewoman, requested admittance.

"Let her come in," said the Count, adding as he turned to the Patriarch, "she will be able to tell you more of Bianca than I can, as I have not seen her since about this hour yesterday. Ah, Cattina, how fares it with my daughter? Ask her if she thinks a visit from two old Cavalieros equivalent to a call from one young one? Ha! ha! ha! and if she has the sense so to consider the matter, his worthiness the Patriarch and I will e'en repair to her chamber."

"Oh! worthy Signors!" exclaimed Cattina, flinging herself on her knees before the Count, "I have been all day like one distracted—indeed, indeed! I am innocent of it all—two nights have I watched by her; and last night, wearied out for want of sleep, she dismissed me, and then—then it was it all happened."

"What has happened," cried the old Count, as he tremblingly arose from his seat, and approached Cattina, "leave riddles, and speak out, girl."

"So please your noble Signor, I know not,"

said the latter, turning away her head as she placed Bianca's letter in the Count's hand, "this is all I know, and would I did not know so much," added she, sobbing audibly.

Count Cappello took the letter Cattina had given him, and read it with trembling hands, and a sort of suffocating sensation, and then rubbing his eyes like one suddenly awakening from a dream, he tried to seek consolation from an improbability. "Perhaps," said he at last—though in reality attaching no faith to his own words—"Perhaps it may not yet be so bad. She says an unforeseen circumstance has obliged her to leave home for some days. Maybe she may have gone to the D'Este's, at Ferrara? a bold measure, assuredly—by herself, and without permission—a matter for serious reprobation, but—but—not hopeless."

"What troubles you, Sposo mio?" asked the Signora Elena, "is it aught in which I can aid you?"

"I fear me not," said the Count placing Bianca's letter in her hand, "read that, and tell me if I am not a miserable old man? or—or," continued he, still clinging to the vague hope he had tried to conjure up, "think you she may have gone to Ferrara?"

"Ferrara!" exclaimed the Contessa, bitterly, when she had finished reading the letter, "she

may certainly have gone to Ferrara, that I do not pretend to gainsay, but I will swear she has not gone thither unaccompanied."

"By whom?" said the Count, starting forward and involuntarily placing his hand on the hilt of his rapier.

"By whom, indeed! why, by whom should it be, but by that villainous Florentine—that Bonaventuri, whom I have so often warned you against."

The old Count groaned.

"Not that handsome youth, Master Salviati's clerk?" interposed the Patriarch.

"The same," replied the Signora Elena, "and a pretty scandal he has brought upon us; that comes of raising low people out of their sphere."

"Nay, sister, but you have no proof that this Master Pietro hath any hand in the matter." said the Patriarch.

"Perhaps, brother, I have no proof that I am the wife of Count Cappello, but as surely as I am, so surely is that low-born varlet the companion of that rash girl's flight."

"Oh! wretched old man," cried the Count, tearing his hair, "what would you have me do? Why have I lived for this? Would nothing serve the villain but to strip the old tree of its last green leaf? Now, indeed, am I withered, root and branch! would that the axe had laid me

low at once, and not lopped me piecemeal after this cruel fashion. My daughter! my fair daughter, of whom I was so proud—she did not—she has not—she *could* not leave me?”

“Nay, marry, but she has though, and henceforward she should be no child of mine,” said Elena, in an affectedly soothing, but really exasperating tone.

“She *was* my child, and therefore *is*,” said the old man with a convulsive sob, “her last night’s kiss still lingers on my cheek—’tis *the only breath that will not leave me!*” added he, staggering to the wall, against which he leant his right arm, hanging his head for a few minutes beneath it; and then suddenly starting forward with his rapier in his hand, exclaimed, making sundry passes through the empty space, “But where is the villain? I will have his blood, though the foul plebeian stream can never wash away the stain he’s put upon our house.”

“Brother,” said the Patriarch, gently placing his hand on the old Count’s arm and arresting his progress, “your resentment is natural, but such hot intemperance befits not your years, I would counsel you to sift this matter forthwith at Salviati’s; and if your fears be verified, and the youth Bonaventuri, be found missing, then proceed to the Doge and demand

the redress—or if you will, the vengeance—on this base betrayer, that befits a Venetian noble and senator.”

“You are right,” said Cappello, making a desperate effort to appear calm, “words are but whirlwinds, that scatter resolution; *deeds!* are the weapons wherewith to meet injuries.—So now to work. For thee, girl,” added he, laying the point of his sword on the still kneeling Cattina’s shoulder, “thou hast done me a grievous wrong in letting this matter slumber for so many hours; had I but known it at the time, pursuit might not have been in vain—go to, thy tears will not mend the matter—bestir thyself, and tell the serving men to be ready on the instant with their torches, to light me to Salviati’s, and on to the Dogal Palace, and bid some of them inquire the whereabouts of the Count Vittorio, let him be sent for wheresoever he tarries.”

Soon after the weeping Cattina left the room, Count Cappello, who continued to evince the most preternatural outward calmness, took the Patriarch’s proffered arm, and prepared, with a firm step, to proceed to Salviati’s. When he had reached the door, and was putting aside the curtain, his progress was suddenly arrested on hearing the voice of his wife.

“ I hope, Bartolommeo,” said she, “ that you will be firm, and not lose sight of the foul, the indelible disgrace, that has been put upon your family ; reparation may be, and I fear me is, impossible, but not so revenge ! And remember, the Senate and the Republic have it in their power to avenge you, but not if you weakly spare her who *was* your daughter.”

The old man groaned, as he waived his hand on leaving the room, avoiding all reply to his inexorable wife’s stern injunctions, and thereby pledging himself to nothing. The echo of his own and Grimani’s feeble footsteps, fell fearfully on his heart as he traversed the spacious and now desolate gallery, leading to the staircase ; for he thought what chance had the feeble and tottering steps of age, against the swift and elastic movements of youth.—“ My son—where is my son ?” said he, on reaching the foot of the stairs,—where stood without the garden door some four and twenty serving men, with blazing torches in massive silver sconces, ready to light him and the Patriarch across to Salviati’s—“ Where is my son, surely I have *one* child ; *he* cannot have left me too !”

“ The Count Vittorio has been sent for, Signor,” said one of the young Cappello’s pages, “ but he is at a banquet given by the Borgia, at

the other side of the Brenta, so it is most probable he can only join you at the Dogal Palace."

"Dispatch another messenger on the instant," said the Count, impatiently, "and tell him to leave revelling and wine cups; but if he still thirsts, he shall have his fill of tears—they are a good and salutary beverage for hot young blood; but somewhat deadly and paralyzing, when they chase old years through nearly marrowless bones—on, knaves, on! why waste ye the precious moments, prating here? you do not hear *me* thawing the crisp air with the hot fire of fruitless words," cried the old man, motioning on the silent crowd, who were awaiting his movements.

On reaching the Casa Salviati, the Count and the Patriarch were instantly admitted to the presence of its respectable master, whom they found seated in a high carved oak chair, in a plain brown arras room, of an octagon shape, with a large bronze table of the same form, covered with papers, before him; which papers he appeared to be attentively investigating. A bright fire of pine wood blazed on the hearth. At the further end of the room, sat, upon an iron box, Baptista Bonaventuri; his arms folded, rocking himself to and fro, and occasionally

muttering between his teeth, "Wretch!—fiend! —pauper!—robber!—they are gone, gone! and I must replace them;—replace them! how can I? I shall be ruined! *Shall be!* I *am* ruined. Is it for this that I have toiled and slaved early and late? Oh! miserable, miserable Baptista!"

While the old miser was thus bewailing himself at the loss of some thousand ducats, with which his hopeful nephew had absconded, Carlo Salviati, who was a steady, respectable-looking individual of between forty and fifty, dressed in a suit of plain brown fustian, with an undressed leather girdle round his waist, and a plain lawn ruff, was, as we have before stated, occupied at the table, calmly, but minutely investigating the papers before him, when the Patriarch and Count Cappello entered.

"Your servant, Signor Salviati," said the latter in a hurried voice, as the merchant rose to receive him, "and your pardon for intruding at so unseasonable an hour, but we come for news of a clerk of yours, a Florentine, one Pietro Bonaventuri;—much depends upon my knowing whether he still be with you?"

"Alas! Signor Conte," commenced Salviati, but before he could utter another syllable, Baptista Bonaventuri had rushed forward, and coming close up to the Count, exclaimed, in

broken accents, while he wrung his withered hands,—“Oh, illustrissimi Signori, you behold before you the most miserable old man on God’s earth.”

“Pardon me, Signor,” interrupted Count Cappello, haughtily starting back a few paces from the close contact of the old usurer, “but *there*, I claim precedence.”

“You ask,” continued Baptista, “for a viper—a serpent—a snake in the grass—a vulture that preys upon living hearts—in short, for the greatest villain that ever cheated a gibbet! one who has robbed his uncle; Signor, think of that—his own uncle!—his kind uncle, who let him keep all the monies his foolish patron Vasari had given him; without insisting upon husbanding them for him, and making him pay discount for them as he wanted them.—And see what hath come of such foolish generosity—the knave hath absconded! gone clean away!—beggaring me, his poor, generous, too-confiding uncle, to the tune of a thousand ducats! for though I kept both the keys of my own strong box, I let the varlet know that there was that sum within. Woe is me! Egypt was a happy land, and a fortunate, for nephews are nowhere mentioned as among the plagues that beset it.”

“I am to gather from your discourse then, Signor,” said Count Cappello, “that this Bona-

venturi, who would seem by your description a complete gallow's bird—but of that anon—is no longer in Venice; therefore I have but one more question to put,—When did he rid our city of so goodly, so honorable, so worthy a sojourner?”

Salviati, seeing that Baptista was about to burst into a fresh storm of invectives against his nephew—who, sooth to say, deserved nothing better at his hands—calmly took upon himself to reply to the Count's question, “Judging from appearances, Signor, he must have taken his departure last night, for the first thing this morning, his uncle found a certain iron coffer of his, containing a thousand ducats and two Spanish bonds for one hundred more, missing; and his nephew gone! but I hope Illustrissimo, that the young scapegrace hath not been exercising his fraudulent talents still farther, by robbing you also?

“Oh, nothing worth mentioning,” said Count Cappello, bitterly, in a deadly calm voice, while no external symptoms of agitation, beyond the convulsive opening and shutting of his hands as he spoke, “a worthless trifle—*merely my daughter!*”

Salviati started—“Good heavens! Signor, surely you rave? He could not, he dare not—”

“It strikes me,” interposed the Patriarch,

now speaking for the first time, "that although the youth Bonaventuri, is, most unfortunately for his own honor's sake absent at this juncture, that there is yet no proof that he hath taken the Count's daughter or this old man's ducats."

"Proof! my daughter is gone!" almost shouted the Count.

"And my ducats are gone! what more proof does your worthiness want?" shrieked Baptista in a shrill, feeble, hollow voice.

"The proof that in both or either instance, your nephew was the spoiler," said the Patriarch.

"I know nothing of the noble Count's daughter," replied Baptista, seeking with trembling hands and rapid movements in all his pockets, till he produced a much crumpled letter, which looked as though it had been tightly grasped in more than one paroxysm of rage, "but here is the proof under his own hand that he stole my ducats; the vile, the beggarly varlet. May each one turn to curses as he spends them."

The Patriarch took the letter from Baptista's violently trembling hand, and read the following heartless proof of young Bonaventuri's cool deliberate fraud upon his uncle, and groaned aloud as he now began to fear that Cappello's young and beautiful, but misguided daughter,

had indeed fallen into utterly unprincipled hands:—

“To the Signor Bonaventuri,”

“Greeting,”

“Most worthy Uncle.—I have resolved (to use your own respected words) ‘*to change my course of life.*’ The chief thing, for which you have often rated me the most soundly, during the happy two years I have passed in your agreeable society, hath been the indolence of my habits, which hitherto hath prevented my being astir at sufficiently early morning; to evitate your reproaches on this head, I beg to inform you, that although it is now but the first hour of day I am already up and doing. You have also taxed me with never trying to *lighten* your labour; and it was only yesterday that you informed me that there was a certain iron coffer in your counting house that contained work for you for a week, and that you had no one to assist you in it; this I have taken off your hands altogether, as I am going a long journey, and nothing *lightens* this sort of weighty matters like travelling. Knowing the kind interest you have always evinced in my welfare—rejoicing in every fresh connection I formed, that could bring golden grist to your iron mill—

I think it right to apprise you that I am about to improve our humble stock, by espousing a noble and beautiful lady; and as you will have every reason to be proud of such a connection, you may have the laudable ambition to wish from time to time to advance our fortunes, (which it will grieve your generous heart to hear are but slender) with sundry gifts of those ducats which have hitherto been such a burden to you from the circumstance of your finding it impossible to dispose of them; therefore, as soon as we have fixed upon a place for our future abode, you shall be the very first whom I shall acquaint with it.

“Trusting that my sudden and unceremonious departure may occasion you no inconvenience, from either Church or Republic,

“I remain, Honoured Uncle,

“Your loving and dutiful Nephew

“To command,

“PIETRO BONAVENTURI.”

“*Casa Salviati,*

“*Venice, December 13, 1561.*”

“We have nothing for it but to proceed to the Doge,” said the Patriarch, calmly refolding young Bonaventuri’s letter, “I fear me ’tis indeed an ugly business, but he may yet assist us.”

“Can he give me back my daughter,” groaned Cappello, as he gathered his cloak about him, and prepared to follow Grimani, whose hand was already on the curtain of the door.

“Will he give me back my ducats,” muttered Baptista, starting to his feet.

“Master Salviati, it is meet that you should accompany us, your evidence will be required touching the foul conduct of this mal-conducted youth; and Heaven grant that the Doge and the Ten may find you as blameless in the matter as you appear to me. For you, old man,” continued he, turning to Baptista, who had hitherto taken but one view of the case—beginning and ending with the circumstance of his having lost his money—“for you the peril is in every way hotter and steeper, the offender is your nephew.”

“I disown him, so please your worthiness,” vehemently interrupted Baptista.

“And your pupil,” continued the Patriarch.

“My pupil! my pupil! did I teach him to rob me?” shouted the old man.

“Be that as it may, friend,” calmly resumed Grimani, “he hath committed an outrage upon a daughter of San Mark’s, and in so doing, the insult is to the Senate and Republic, and they will resent it; therefore, to be of kin to any such, is not likely to advance your fortunes.”

“ Surely, surely,” cried Baptista, wringing his hands, “ it is enough to be robbed—deceived—betrayed by such a reprobate, without being implicated in his villainies.—I, who am the chief martyr !”

“ That remains for the Council to decide,” said the Patriarch, sternly, as he led the way out of the chamber followed by Count Cappello, Salviati, and Baptista, and not a little roused at the latter putting his paltry gold in competition with Cappello’s daughter.

When they reached the hall, they found all Salviati’s servitors collected, whispering mysteriously with the Count’s torchbearers; this was to him a fresh opening of his wound, as he concluded—and not without reason—that they were conversing about, and commenting upon his daughter’s disgrace. However, on the appearance of their master and his guests, they instantly fell back into silence. As the four passed on into the dark and narrow street, on their way to the Dogal Palace, none of them spoke; and as the red glare of the torches fell athwart the darkness of the night, which was cold and gusty in the extreme, it would have been difficult for it to discover four more sad and care-fraught faces than now proceeded to San Mark’s;—the shortness of the distance not

giving sufficient time to the chill air in any degree to brace their nerves, or dissipate their respective anxieties.

On arriving at the Palace, persons of the Patriarch's and of Cappello's rank were not long in gaining admission to the Doge.

Priuli was a wifeless, childless, old man, the whole of whose domestic appendages consisted of a faithful staghound and a blazing hearth; both of which now lay at his feet, as he slept calmly in a high-backed, and according to modern notions, very *uneasy* chair, in his own private apartment. Twice had the Exon of the Guard made way for the senior of the four pages in waiting to enter, and twice had the page approached the Doge without daring to awake him; yet the third time, the fear of detaining the Patriarch and Count Cappello too long in the large cold gallery where he had left them, overcame his scruples, and gently touching Rilienzo the sleeping staghound's ear with the point of his foot, the liberty as he anticipated was instantly resented by one deep loud bark, which effectually awoke the Doge,—“So, ho! softly, child, what ails thee?” said the latter, suddenly awaking and rubbing his eyes as he stooped down to pat the dog's head, which was instantly placed on his master's knee to facilitate

the process of petting, while his large clear brown eyes were turned round and kept steadily fixed on the intruding page.

“Pardon, your highness,” said the page, “but his worthiness the Patriarch of Aquilea, and the Count Cappello, await without, and have demanded an audience upon a matter that they say presses.”

“Admit them,” said the Doge, arranging his robes, and replacing his cap upon his head, which previous to his siesta he had laid upon the table.

“Ah! worthy Patriarch, and you, most noble Count, are welcome to our privacy; and I cannot but thank you for the true friendship and gentle courtesy which hath brought you forth on such a night to save us from dull solitude, be seated, pray,” added Priuli.

Cappello sank into a chair that the page had placed for him, as if unable any longer to trust to his feeble limbs for support; but the Patriarch approached the Doge, and in an under voice informed him (as far as they came within his own knowledge), of the circumstances attending Bianca’s elopement.

“Ha! say you so?” said Priuli, rising and ringing a small golden hand-bell that stood on the table before him, “this must be looked into.” And ordering the page who replied to the

summons instantly to dispatch messengers to the members of the Council of Ten, and to order the lights to be lit in the council chamber, he turned to Cappello, saying: "I need not tell you Count how deeply I sympathize with your affliction, for, in fact, the *insult* is to us all in common, though the blow may be especially your own. This plebeian Florentine, in aspiring to, and stealing away, a daughter of San Mark's, hath outraged the Republic, the Senate, and the nobles of Venice, and they it is who must be triply avenged; as for your private feelings, Signor, they may not be so easily healed, but all that can be done, shall, even to the restoration of your daughter, if such be possible, but I much fear me that this audacious Florentine will make straight for his native city, and the Medici are ever against us in their shelter to, and protection of, such varlets; especially now that the aspiring Cosimo hath cradled his ambition in inglorious repose, and left the misguiding of the state to his saturnine, but sensual son, Francesco; it is true that the Cardinal Ferdinando is a good and upright man, but it is to be feared that he hath but little weight in the political Pandemonium of the Florentine republic. It is a pity too," continued the Doge, more soliloquising in answer to his own thoughts than addressing Cappello,

as the three fingers of his right hand were placed before his upper lip, and his fore finger pressed his temple, "it is a pity too, that the fugitives have had so many hours the start of us,—but come, this is no place for the dispatch of business, with your good leave, Signor, we will to the council chamber, where we can consult the wisdom of our colleagues ; but it strikes me there are others still wanting, your son the Count Vittorio, the merchant Salviati, and above all his chief clerk Baptista, this youth Bonaventuri's uncle."

"My son is sent for, and will be here anon," said the Count, in a scarcely audible voice, and still leaning his forehead in his hand.

"And Salviati and his clerk wait without," interposed the Patriarch.

"'Tis well—then we will proceed," said the Doge, again ringing the hand-bell, which appeal was instantly answered by two pages, who summoned two more, to carry lights before Priuli and his guests to the council chamber; the former taking an affectionate leave of his faithful staghound, who looked wistfully after his master, but was too well trained to follow him ; while Grimani offered his arm to Count Cappello, who much needed the assistance, feeble as it was. No sooner had the Doge appeared at the door, than the soldiers on guard,

consisting of some fifty men, shouldered their arquebuses, and dividing into equal numbers, filed off on either side to accompany him in his transit through the three long galleries he had to traverse on his way to the chamber of the Council of Ten. In the first, he found Salviati and Baptista, the former calm and collected, but the latter rocking himself to and fro, in a sort of impotent frenzy.

“Worthy Master Salviati,” said Priuli, courteously, “I grieve that you have been so long left to tarry here with the chill night, and still more aggrieved am I at the sad cause that hath brought you forth at such an hour; but for you Signor Baptista,” added he sternly, turning to that individual, “I do fear me that worse storms are about to lower upon you than those of the elements.”

“Alas! your Highness, what have I done but suffer in the whole of this business,—I am the most miserable of men! Could uncles choose their nephews, *then*, indeed, should I be to blame, or rather then should I have incurred no blame, for I should never have chosen any; a plague upon my brother that ever inflicted the curse of unclehood upon me. Oh! most potent, puissant, and mighty of human powers, good and great Doge,” continued Baptista, clasping his hands, and about to fall on his

knees, had not the Doge forcibly prevented him, "save, oh! save me, I beseech you, from the ordeal of the Council of Ten; and in remembering that I am an uncle, remember that no punishment can go beyond it!"

"Then Signor," said Priuli, with an almost imperceptible smile, "rise and follow us to the council, for since, by your own account, you have arrived at the worst, you can have nothing further to fear."

A groan was Baptista's only reply, as he prepared to obey, for he knew that from the Doge's mandate there was no appeal; and a deadly and ill-omened chill came over him, as the clanking armour of the soldiers echoed along the marble floor, and the wind and rain howled and beat against the wide, but small paned lattice windows, as the *cortége* proceeded along the spacious but desolate galleries, to the chamber of the Council of Ten, where the men at arms stationed themselves without the door, while the Doge and his party entered, but found the chamber still untenanted. As it was nearly midnight before the different members of the council could be collected together, from the suddenness of their convocation, and they had scarcely taken their respective seats, ere a fresh commotion was heard in the corridor; the secret signal was given at the door, the chief

Inquisitor rose, and previous to opening it, pronounced the pass word, or rather oath, which alone gained admittance to that fatal chamber, namely :

*Jura, perjura, secretum prodere noli ! **

The person from without having answered “ I swear,” the door was opened, and Vittorio Cappello entered ; his brows were knit, his nether lip bitten till the blood had started, and his cheek much flushed, it might be with wine, as making a profound bow, first to the Doge, and then a circular one that comprised the whole of the Ten, he haughtily flung himself into a chair, ungirding his rapier, and unclasping his cloak, the heat of which, cold as the night was, seemed to oppress him. The messenger who had sought him at the Villa Borgia, had informed him of his sister’s elopement, and of the supposed companion of her flight. Could curses kill, Vittorio would have been sisterless, and Bianca a widow, ere his return to Venice ; as it was, he could find no vent for his fury but in plans of vengeance against Arianna, whom he resolved upon denouncing as the chief aider and abetter, not to say instigator, of his sister’s disgrace ; by which means he calculated upon getting the former completely into his power, and rendering

* Swear, forswear, and reveal not the secret.

her subservient to his will. It was, therefore, with difficulty that the aspiring and imperious spirit of this haughty young noble could be kept sufficiently within the control, not indeed of his better judgment, but of his habitual deference to the assembly by which he was now surrounded, to restrain him from obtruding his opinion till his turn for giving it should arrive in due form.

The first person examined was the merchant Salviati;—his answers, even upon the most subtle and intricate cross examination, were so perfectly clear, uncontradictory, and exculpatory, of his having any knowledge, connivance, or even suspicion of the youth Bonaventuri's flight; that he was speedily acquitted; independent of the evident justice of this proceeding, it would have been a matter of serious personal inconvenience to any one of these ten second Daniels come to judgment, to have periled the personal safety of so wealthy, influential, and above all, (for that was far more german to the matter) so liberal, and accommodating a banker as Salviati. His head clerk, Baptista Bonaventuri, being considered the most important witness, from his relationship to the delinquent, was reserved for the last, and the Patriarch of Aquilea, and Count Cappello, were next examined. The Patriarch's evidence, of course, was slight and brief, merely com-

prising a statement of his first interview with Pietro Bonaventuri, at one of his own levees, where he had come on business of a private nature, on the part of his master Salviati; his second, and last, meeting with the young man, some six months before, at the aquatic fête given by the admiral of the fleet, on the occasion of the Archduchess Joan's visit; and the particulars he had gleaned that night, at the Palazzo Cappello, of his elopement with the noble daughter of that house. No sooner had the Patriarch concluded his deposition, than Count Cappello was ordered to advance to the council table, and his name having been re-echoed by the Ten, the old man rose slowly from his seat, and unsheathing his rapier, availed himself of the slight support it afforded him as he advanced to the front of the tribunal.

“Count Cappello,” said the Doge, rising and receiving from the chief Inquisitor as he spoke a large gold baton or mace, which he held pointed at arm's length in his right hand over the council table, “we charge you, as a Venetian noble, senator, and citizen, and as you shall answer it at the last awful tribunal of God's judgment, from which there is no appeal, to lay before us, and these our trusty and well-beloved, spiritual and temporal counsellors, your present source of grievance and complaint,

nothing adding thereto that may aggravate it, and so warp the ends of justice; and nothing concealing or diminishing therefrom that may in anywise shield the offenders, this I charge you, and as you shall deal with us, so may God deal with you." "*Amen*," echoed the Ten, as the Doge sat down, and the Patriarch spread out his hands as if in the act of invoking a silent blessing on the Doge's exhortation.

These forms ended, Count Cappello spoke as follows, with an erect bearing, but some what tremulous voice, which however became more steady as he proceeded: "Great Doge, and you unerring, wise, and puissant Seniors, my charge is brief, not so the wrong that hath been done me. I *had* a daughter, but that is past, she hath been stolen from me; not by one whose blood has flowed through equal channels with her own, and round whose brows entwine the diadem'd nobility of centuries, lending a grace where none might else exist, but by a low unheard of knave, the foul plebeian stream of whose dull life cannot claim even the poor filtering of three generations. This, then, is the base varlet who hath stolen away my daughter.—Yet, where falleth the indelible wrong? Not surely upon me! for a broken heart but lives and

dies with its possessor, and the grave to which I am nearing hourly, is a safe storehouse for all such dilapidated ware; but not so, mighty Doge, and you unerring, wise, and puissant Seniors, when some cankering spot of foul dishonour lights upon an illustrious order, it finds nor end, nor shroud, in time; but is thrown from the charnel-house of dire events, like a loathsome and unburied corpse, to sicken and appal all future ages. Such dishonour hath now befallen our, *your*, order; it is not old Bartolommeo Cappello, the worms' next of kin, that sues to you for redress, but it is the Venetian nobles, and the conclave of San Mark's, that call aloud upon you to avenge the insult that hath been put upon them. And yet," continued the old man, his voice again faltering, "be not too extreme to deal with what I have not got, *I have no daughter* now. What then? She will soon have no father. And is not this a sufficient balancing of that account?—but for her base despoiler, mete out your vengeance to him in the fullest measure that you list, and if its overflowings reach her, 'tis no fault of mine; fire *will* burn, and water quench, and those who tamper with either must take their chance for stemming them, or be scathed by the one, or sunk by the other, as fate shall decide; and

who shall baffle fate? not wealth, not power, not patient lowliness 'neath wrong, nor yet that firm resolve that is the giant sire of mighty deeds; nor hopes, nor prayers, whose issue are with God! My fate is sealed! and well I know that you, great Doge, and ye, unerring, wise, and puissant Seniors, cannot alter it, but you *can* brand the villain that hath sealed it; let but a price be set upon his head, and it must be great indeed if my coffers cannot furnish it. Methinks the skull of this base knave would much embellish our armorial bearings, and as nothing would serve him but to thrust it under our Cardinal's hat, even let it remain there for all times, to show that when such rabble *will* aspire to alliances so much above them, they must for ever separate themselves from their plebeian body. Your pardon, Seniors, sorrow is self-ended, I do forget myself, and trespass on your time, which may be better spent than listening to the wailings of a broken-hearted old man, who, nathless, though his last breath were to fleet before to-morrow's sun arise, demands and must have vengeance on this Bonaventuri. In your hands I leave him, and so await your pleasure."

So saying, the old Count sat down, amid a murmur of assent from the Doge and Council;

and his son was next summoned to examination, after a similar exhortation on the part of the Doge to that which had preceded his father's, and Vittorio having addressed the Council in the same form, said—

“ But it strikes me, Seniors, with all due deference, that the Count, my father, hath made one great omission, in not stating to your wisdoms, that the chief instigator of my sister's disgraceful conduct, and, therefore, the chief subject for punishment in this business, is an humble companion and foster sister of hers, one Arianna Ferrai, the daughter of the goldsmith of that name, who lives on the New Bridge,—

“ Impossible ! Vittorio,” interrupted Count Cappello, “ for the maiden hath entered the service of the Countess Invezia D'Este, and been gone to Belrignano these three months.”

“ 'Sdeath ! gone ! and without my knowledge !” exclaimed Vittorio, for a moment, and but for a moment, completely thrown off his guard by the suddenness of the announcement, and the possibly consequent frustration of his plans against her ; till recollecting himself, he added, with a *sang froid* that baffled the keenest scrutiny, “ Oh—ah ! true, I do remember, but that alters not the substance of what I was

about to state ; I would advise you, seniors, that this damsel, the goldsmith's daughter, is more than suspected of witchcraft,—”

“ By whom ?” interrupted Count Cappello : which query was echoed simultaneously—

“ By whom ?”

“ By *me !*” said Vittorio boldly, and speaking with much vehement rapidity, in the design of hiding the shallowness of his assertions, “ *By me !* and I firmly believe, that though not actually in the Venetian territories, her diabolical spells and charms have wrought with wondrous power on those still here.”

“ So it would appear,” interrupted the patriarch sarcastically, who had known Arianna from her childhood, and respected her many virtues, and purity and singleness of character while he had sincerely pitied her for Vittorio's profligate persecution, and highly approved of her departure to Ferrara. “ So it would appear, though as far as my observation goes, I should say that her *charms*, Signor Vittorio, had wrought a powerful effect on the *brother*, not the *sister*.”

For a moment even Vittorio was abashed into silence by so home a truth, especially as his father had clenched the matter by saying, “ Your worthiness is right ; my son may indeed be the victim of this poor damsel's witcheries,

the whole of whose spells I believe to lie in heartcraft, but all this falls wide of the present matter."

The chief Inquisitor pitying Vittorio Cappello's humiliated confusion, said,

"But whom, Signor Vittorio, do you suspect to be this damsel's agent in her sorceries? for that all witches have agents, is an acknowledged fact."

"I should say," replied Vittorio, making a desperate effort to rally—his speech into an appearance of plausibility—"from many incidents that have come under my observation, that her principal if not her sole agent hath been Bianca's dwarf Ghirihizzo, and that he ought (till such time as Arianna Ferrai can be secured and brought back to Venice) be taken into custody, and closely questioned by the contadino's daughter. *

"Nay, nay," interposed Count Cappello, "I will not have the poor fool harmed, the very idea of his being an accomplice in witchcraft is ridiculous—'twere as wise to suspect the little dogs intrusted to his charge. By the mass, Vittorio, thou wert wont to have a wiser

* The Countryman's Daughter, an instrument of torture in Italy in the 16th century, the same as that known by the name of the Scavenger's Daughter in England, at the same period.

head, than to harbour such phantasms — get thee to school again to learn common sense !”

When we feel that we have said or done a silly thing, we are apt to exaggerate the quantum of absurdity attributed to us by others and feel more self-contempt, than in all probability, they have taken the trouble to bestow upon us. So it was with Vittorio Cappello, being unable to reply to his father’s sarcasm, he bit his lip in silent pique and drawing himself up to his full height looked all the dignity with which he felt it was utterly impossible to invest his absurd charges.

“Has the Count Vittorio anything farther to depose ?” demanded the chief Inquisitor.

“Nothing !” replied Vittorio haughtily ;— “Since my view of the case is scoffed at by my father, I only hope that he, and this worshipful council here assembled, will find some surer and more satisfactory way of vindicating his daughter’s *honor* !” And Vittorio sat down darkly resolving that though foiled on this occasion in his attempt to ruin Arianna, he would reserve his efforts for some future period, when he did not despair of success.

The chief Inquisitor, by no means, liking to lose sight of so fertile a theme for public excitement as a trial for witchcraft, which was always

a good staple commodity for the holy office, now rose and said :—

“It appears to me that the conduct of this maiden Ferrai, the goldsmith’s daughter is a separate count, and must be looked into at a future period. As time presses, and our object now is to overtake for the purposes of justice the immediate delinquent, Pietro Bonaventuri, therefore we will proceed to examine our last and most important witness, now present, his uncle Baptista Bonaventuri, whom—in the names of Geromino Priuli, Doge of Venice, Andrea Gritti, Pascal Cicogna, F. Venieri, Marino Grimani, Francesco Molino, Dominico Contarini, Luigi Foscari, Giovanni Pesaro, Pietro Lando, Luigi Moncenigo, Giovanni Bembo, Leonardo Donate, Francesco Errizo, P. Loredano, Alessandro Borgia, and I, Ugolino Gregorio, members of the Council of Ten—we command to stand forth.”

Notwithstanding this generally omnipotent mandate, Baptista had to be dragged to the council table by two familiars of the inquisition, always in waiting; he had no sooner arrived there, than he fell upon his knees in the most abject manner, and tearing his hair, and wringing his hands, recapitulated his nephew’s conduct towards himself, and produced his letter adding, “You see most noble and omnipotent

Seniors, how I stand forth the chief victim in this villain's delinquencies ; therefore I do hope that this honorable council, as well as the senate and republic, will take a poor old man's irreparable losses into their august consideration and award him some compensation for the same."

Padre Gregorio feeling that it was absolutely necessary to sacrifice some immediate victim to the outrage that had been put upon so noble a family as the Cappello's, and as none other was at hand, and Baptista Bonaventuri was by no means either as popular or as accommodating as his master Salviati, the chief Inquisitor had previously decided, that although his innocence in, and ignorance of, his nephew's delinquency should upon investigation appear as clear as noon-day, yet should such fair appearances only be treated by himself and the Council as merely the result of superior and more practised craft on his part.

Accordingly when the old man produced Pietro's letter, and followed it up by an imploring appeal to the "Ten" to have some pity on his misfortunes, and afford some relief to his wrongs. Padre Gregorio knit his brows portentously, as he replied that he could not, without much farther investigation, consider Baptista's statement, plausible as it seemed, and his nephew's letter, any more than subtle inventions of

the former to mislead the judgment of the Council, and that consequently for the ends of justice, he must sentence him to a temporary imprisonment, till the whole of his nephew's conduct should be thoroughly examined into. The chief Inquisitor then affected to refer this his fiat (from which he as well as the unhappy Baptista knew there was no appeal) to the rest of the council assembled; who, as a matter of course, unhesitatingly ratified it. Whereupon the two familiars in waiting immediately proceeded to the preliminary ceremony of searching the victim, to see that he carried about him neither weapons of self-destruction, nor implements of escape. His stiletto was soon found and handed over to the chief Inquisitor but, when they commenced searching within his vest, the old man made a violent but impotent struggle to retain, and conceal, something that was appended to a small iron chain round his neck.

“For God's sake—for pity's sake, sweet Sirs, and noble Seniors,” cried he, frantically flinging himself on his knees, while he kept his hands tightly crossed on his breast to guard the treasure within, “do not rob me of that, it is my Agnus Dei* that I have worn for years!”

* Agnus-Deis, in the Church of Rome, are wax cakes stamped with the figure of a lamb supporting the banner of

But deaf to his entreaties, the strongest of his two spoilers wrenched the contested object from within his bosom, which flinging down upon the council table before Padre Gregorio, proved to be not an Agnus-Dei, although covered with a heart in imitation of one, but a heavily laden leathern purse filled with large gold Spanish doubloons.

“Nay, Signor Baptista,” said the Chief Inquisitor with a caustic smile, “this gives us additional reason for our sentence, if your veracity be but half as much at fault as your piety—for instead of an Agnus Dei, albeit this turns out to be a somewhat new and ponderous insignia of the Golden Fleece ; however,” continued he, balancing the purse, which by reason of its weight he could with difficulty hold between both hands, “we will expend this heavy sin of yours in Agnus-Deis for your poorer brethren, which is doubtless the purpose your charity meant eventually to appropriate it to.

the cross. The name literally signifies “Lamb of God.” These cakes being consecrated by the Pope with great solemnity, and distributed among the people, are supposed to have great virtues. They cover them with a piece of stuff cut in the form of a heart, and carry them very devoutly in their processions. The Romish priests and religious orders derive considerable pecuniary advantage from selling them to some and presenting them to others, while the devout constantly carry them about their persons as an infallible guard against evil.

And now knaves," added he, waving his hand to the two familiars, "do your office." A mandate which they instantly obeyed, despite the shrill and frightful shrieks of the miserable old man, whom they soon succeeded in dragging to the other end of the room (not the centre, for whoever vanished from thence never appeared again), but to a corner near the wall, along which were suspended between a frame, like maces and cues in a modern billiard room, some half dozen large torches. One of the familiars having taken down two of them, which he lighted, retaining one, and giving the other to his companion, next stamped heavily on the part of the floor where they were standing with their prisoner, which, being a trap-door, was immediately opened to the summons, and the trio descended, the two familiars standing erect, and holding their torches like halberds—but their victim, who had swooned, lying prostrate between them, but tightly pinioned to the ground by each of them having placed their right foot upon his chest.

During the few minutes that the trio were disappearing, and that elapsed before the absent portion of the floor returned to its former place, occupying in all a period of not more than five minutes, a profound silence reigned throughout the council chamber, after

which the faint tracing of the chief Inquisitor's pen might be heard pursuing its course along a fair sheet of parchment, which, when he had filled with what he deemed sufficient matter, he handed to the Doge, who nodded a silent assent over it, and then passed it to the rest of the Council and the Cappellos, who affixed their signatures to it—after which, the second hour of the morning having struck, the conclave dispersed in the same order in which they had arrived, and no trace remained that such a person as Baptista Bonaventuri had ever existed, except perhaps the sigh that escaped his master, Salviati, and the quick motion with which the latter shaded his eyes as the wretched old man sank into regions which so far resembled the infernal ones, that those who entered them generally “*resigned all hope.*”

Before the dreary dungeon in which Baptista was incarcerated echoed on the following morning with the groans of his returning consciousness, all Venice—aye, and even beyond the marshes—was placarded with a reward of two thousand ducats* for Pietro Bonaventuri's

* This was the exact sum offered by the Venetian state for young Bonaventuri's head, which nevertheless (though in those days an enormous sum), strange to say, failed in procuring it; but while the guilty nephew escaped, the guiltless uncle yielded up the remnant of his miserable existence in a loathsome prison.

head, signed by the Doge and the Council of Ten, which, notwithstanding its name, consisted of sixteen members beside the Doge, ten counsellors of the black robe being annually elected in the months of August and September, while the six counsellors of the red robe, which formed part of "*the Signoria*," entered into office every four months. This Council pretended to guard the state with a power higher than the law.

CHAPTER II.

" It is decreed, and we must yield to fate,
Whose angry justice, though it threatens ruin,
Contempt, and poverty, is all but trial
Of a weak woman's constancy in suffering."—FORD.

" And will you ever be thus kind, my Lord?
Ever thus charming—ever thus sincere?
Will not reflection freeze this marriage nectar?
Will not your draughts of love be bitter think you,
When longer mixed with pleasure's wormwood—wife?"
HILL'S FAIR INCONSTANT.

LOVE is life's carnival, wherein all realities are masked, and we only discover the true features of the circumstances by which we are surrounded in the dismal Lent of marriage. Notwithstanding the rapid journey—of to her, new and unimagined privation and discomfort—Bianca had no feeling clearly defined in her mind but one of happiness at being with Bonaventuri! It is true that, as new scenes presented themselves to her view, so far from obliterating, they only served to remind her

with painful poignancy of her for ever forfeited country and home—for, alas !

“ Patriæ quis exul
Se quoque fugit ;”

yet still in the morning of life our hopes are the very reverse of our shadows—the former seeming long and bright, as they lure us onwards into fate’s unknown and too often dark and perilous vista ; indeed, what the great heathen so beautifully said of the Deity—that “ God is truth, and light is his shadow”—may be paraphrased with regard to our earlier years, for youth is hope, and light is its shadow.

To Bianca there was even an excitement by no means unpleasing in the novelty of bad inns, worse fare, and the total absence of all the pomp and state she had all her life been accustomed to ; and when the privations she encountered were of a nature too disagreeable or disgusting to be a source of amusement, she exalted her feelings into a tone of heroic martyrdom, that exulted in bearing these and more gladly for her lover’s sake, always taking care to fill up the background of the picture that her imagination continued vividly to paint with a sort of Arcadia on the banks of the Arno, such as she conceived to be her future home, and when she had sketched in all the fairy-like details to her own perfect

satisfaction, she would playfully turn to Bonaventuri and ask him "if it were not very like?"

"Not exactly, dearest," he would reply, with a sigh, dreading, and with too much reason, the shock of all the coarse realities of the *home* he was bringing his high-born and beautiful bride to—"not exactly; I fear me you only know our sluggish and muddy Arno through the medium of false poets, whose magic numbers have transmuted its dense and dismal waters into the bright flowings of liquid silver; besides, you know, love," added he, biting his nether lip, as a deep flush suffused his cheek, "*my* father is but a poor artist, and I fear you will find a vast difference between marble blocks and marble palaces."

"He is *your* father, and his home will be ours, and is not that enough?" interrupted Bianca, fondly flinging her beautiful arm round her husband's neck.

"Heaven grant that you may find it so, dear one," sighed Bonaventuri, as he fervently returned her kiss.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon, beneath a red and glowing yet stormy and wintry-looking sun, that the rumbling and clumsy vehicle in which, for the better concealment of their persons, Bianca and Bona-

venturi had travelled, stopped at the door of the locanda of the Tre Delfini to refresh themselves and their mules. Pietro always took the precaution to alight first at all the inns, and reconnoitre in case of any lurking or covert danger, and although on the present occasion he considered that they were too near their journey's end, and the haven of security they were making for, to apprehend any evil, yet he still prudently resolved upon pursuing the same precautions he had all along adopted ; so slouching the large leafed riding hat, with its one black feather, which he wore, over his handsome face, he whispered to Bianca to remain in the ambush of their ark-like vehicle, while he got out and proceeded to the kitchen of the hostelry.

Luckily for him, that sapient and zealous individual, Cesare Cinti, was absent at Sienna, either in quest of wine or witches, for the first thing that met Bonaventuri's eye among the gems of mine host's mural literature was the proclamation in right excellent Venetian, stamped with the arms of San Mark's, and the signets of the Council of Ten, offering a reward of two thousand ducats for his head, and giving an accurate description of a person, which, albeit handsome as it was, he would gladly at that moment have exchanged for one

of less fair proportions. This was the first intimation he had had of the value the Venetian States set upon him, and the knowledge was anything but either flattering or agreeable, for great as his ambition was to build to a towering height the goodly fabric of his fortunes, he wished to achieve the undertaking without the intervention of a scaffold.

“Ho! mistress,” said he, turning to the hostess, who was roasting chesnuts over a brazier, “a beaker of your best Montepulciano, and a feed of corn for my mules directly, for I would reach Florence ere sun-down.”

“Subito—Subito!” screamed the landlady, giving a parting toss to the chesnuts as she made her exit to execute Bonaventuri’s orders. The latter no sooner saw her fairly gone, and having ascertained by a hasty glance that, after her departure, he was, with the exception of a small red fox-dog, in sole possession of the kitchen, and that the aforesaid four-footed occupant was moreover from the quick panting of his very lean ribs, and the gentle undulations—vulgo, waggings—of his bushy tail, as he lay sleeping before the niggardly embers of a truly Italian fire, evidently dreaming of sundry chicken and pigeon-bones that never blessed his waking jaws, and therefore not likely to interfere with his design, than drawing his

rapier, Pietro ripped the description of his own person from the wall, and flattening it down with the back of his hand, had just time to fold and conceal it within his doublet, when the hostess returned with the wine, which he hastily swallowed and liberally paid for.

"You have plenty of blood-money there, Dame, if you could but come at it," said Bonaventuri, carelessly pointing over his shoulder, as he drew on his gloves, to the placards that still remained upon the wall, now almost invisible from the declining light without, and the dark recess in which they were placed within.

"I trouble myself little about such matters, and am always glad when the poor creatures escape. All *that* is Cesare's nonsense—but then I suppose all husbands are fools," concluded Teresa Cinti in a resigned voice, as she transferred the now roasted chesnuts into a piece of old blanket that awaited them.

"Or deserve to be made so, eh, cara mia?" said Bonaventuri, in answer to the landlady's last supposition as he chucked her brown chin, adding, "But where is yours just now?"

"At Sienna, Signore."

"Well, then, a safe and speedy journey to him back," said Pietro, moving towards the door, not sorry to find that there was that

much ground between him and the zealous malefactor-hunting Cesare Cinti.

"Nay, the slower his journey, and the longer his stay, the better pleased I shall be," replied his loving better half.

"So small thanks to you for that wish, Signor," screamed the landlady at the top of her voice as Bonaventuri left the kitchen of the hostelry, and reascending the clumsy old vehicle, ordered the driver to proceed at the quickest pace he could to Florence.

"You did not stay long love," said Bianca, when the door was closed, and they were again in motion.

"Long enough," replied her husband with a faint smile, "to have my portrait done, dost think it like, pretty one?" added he, gently encircling her waist and placing his head upon her shoulder, as he put into her hand the placard offering a reward for his head, that he had abstracted from the wall of the inn.

Bianca shuddered as she read it, "And all this," she exclaimed, clasping her hands, and with a woman's self-abandoning generosity of spirit never once remembering how many infinitely greater risks *she* had run, and sacrifices she made for *him*, "and all this you have braved for me!"

"Nay, love," said he, playfully kissing away

her tears as they fell, "having lost my heart to you, it was little to run the risk of losing my head as a sequel."

Bianca sighed, and they both relapsed into the silence of unpleasant thoughts; hers for the first time approached to a nearer view of the gulf into which she had plunged; his, hovered on the ruffled wings of mortified vanity around the home! he was bringing her to.—Home! home! thou little word of great meaning! how Proteus-like is thy signification, but to *all* thou art *the* zone that binds their weal, or woe. To some thou art, fond hearts, happy faces, kind looks, growing infancy, benignant age, broad lands, smiling gardens, sunny nooks, bubbling streams, gilded halls, a solace, and a shelter, *the* storm-proof harbour of life's tempestuous sea. To others, thou art a churlish step dame, the bitterness of whose niggard pittances is increased by the mockery of the maternal epithet thou bearest, withholding all the kindness, yet exacting all the affection of a real parent; to such thou art a judgment, and a fear, an inquisition, where thought may ne'er have life in speech, the cradle of every annoyance, the tomb of every joy, on whose portals are inscribed the real

Lasciate ogni speranza voi che entrate,
"Leave every hope O you who enter here."

While many, for they are by no means a small class, never know but one home,—the grave! Bonaventuri's distress on the present occasion, as he neared what had been, and was again to be his home, arose from no sensitive dread of the contrast and privations his beautiful and high-born wife was likely to endure in it; but from a sense of shame, and wounded pride, at her discovering the full extent of the lowness of his origin, and the vulgarity of his connexions, not indeed his father, for he was an honest, simple, unpretending, old man, who was, what he was, without ever aspiring to be what he was not; and where there is neither pretension, arrogance, nor affectation, there may be coarseness, but it is scarcely possible there should be vulgarity. But Pietro knew that his father had lately received a consignment from the eastern Indies, in the shape of a married sister to preside over his ménage, one Emilia Sylvestro, such a compound of meanness, vulgarity, vanity, low cunning, affectation, and *minanderie*, as it would not be easy to meet with in a year's search, and it was the mildew of this association that he dreaded for his aristocratic bride. "But sufficient for the day is the evil thereof;" and we will not anticipate.

In those days before posts were, Bonaventuri

had dispatched a messenger from Bologna, apprizing his father of his approach, and had learnt, by the return of the same messenger at one of the passes in the Apennines, that old Bonaventuri no longer lived in his former quarters on the Lungo d'Arno, but had removed to a somewhat more commodious tenement on the Piazza del Duomo.

As they approached Florence amid the red glare of a winter sunset. Bianca's spirits rose at the thought of so soon terminating her journey, and being installed in her future home ! while on the contrary, Bonaventuri's flagged, as he reflected upon the wide difference that existed between the Arcadian elegancies of theoretical, and the nauseous vulgarities of real, poverty which he knew awaited her.

"How beautiful your Florence is !" said Bianca, putting her head out of the window as they entered it.

"And yet," said Bonaventuri—"this is by no means the most beautiful side of Florence, the other is far prettier, and in the summer, I must bring you to Vallombrosa ; there is something so original in the scenery that I think you will be enchanted with it ; it always gives me the idea of a Creator having began a world and left it unfinished, even its wilderness of wild flowers, and fruits appear to be growing

out of the waves of a petrified sea, and for a storm! you have no idea of one, till you have heard it there." Immediately Bianca's imagination was rambling with her husband amid the wild Paradise of Vallombrosa.

"I see," said Bonaventuri with a sigh, "that you are disappointed with my native city, and I fear, love, you will be more so with the home I am bringing you to."

"Is it not *your* home?" replied Bianca, placing her pretty little hand before his mouth.

"So no more of that, prythee, or I shall think you fancy that you have married the Doge of Venice, instead of his poor little cousin—bye the bye, I hope your father will like me?"

"There is no fear of that, and I *think*, and hope you will like him, but I confess I dread the peculiar and fussy sort of vulgarity of my Indian aunt."

"You forget love," said Bianca with her most silvery laugh, "that I have served an apprenticeship to female Dragonism, and disagreeability with my amiable step dame, Elena, which ought to make me torment-proof for the rest of my life."

"Aye, but the Signora Elena with all her detestability is still a high dame, and heaven knows my aunt Emelia is anything but that!"

As Bonaventuri spoke, the heavy old coach

turned into the Piazza del Duomo, and rumbled on till it stopped before the door of his father's studio. In those days none but persons of the highest distinction travelled in any sort of carriage ; mules and saddle horses being the ordinary mode of performing journeys, it was therefore not surprising that on the arrival of the one containing his son and his bride, a large concourse of people should have collected before Giovanni Bonaventuri's door, who with one or two of his journeymen was endeavouring but in vain to disperse them, as Pietro with a beating heart helped Bianca to alight from the ponderous vehicle. Although the shades of twilight were falling, it was not so dark, but a murmur ran through the mob at Bianca's wondrous beauty, especially as at that moment a procession of choristers with torches in their hands issued from the Baptistry, immediately opposite Giovanni's house, and the glare of the lights falling around her, brought her out in strong relief, like some beautiful vision, which had suddenly descended from a brighter region amid the ungainly, and "of the earth, earthy" group that pressed about her.

At this moment too, the Grand Duke Francesco de Medici rode past with a party of his courtiers, and seemed evidently not the least struck of the crowd with the beauty of the

young Venetian. I say the Grand Duke, for though at that epoch Cosmo the First still reigned, yet disgusted with absolute power, which had been for him a constant exercise of dissimulation and perfidy, he had confided all the cares and secrets of government to his son Francesco, whose character was even more gloomy and saturnine than his own, and infinitely more sensual; and his approaching marriage with the Arch Duchess, Jane of Austria, whose plain person, and coldness, and pride of disposition, were little calculated to inspire affection, formed not the slightest check to his licentious pleasures.

After leaning back in his saddle to catch the last glimpse of Bianca as she entered her father-in-law's house, Francesco turned first to the cavalier on his right, and then to the one on his left, who were two of his most obsequious satellites,—namely, Counts Guiliani Ricasoli, and Silvio Piccolomini; and muttered “*Giovanni Bonaventuri, Scultore*, remember, Signors, that we encourage this honest artist; let the Birth of Io be ordered from him to-morrow for the Ricciardi Palace.” *

“It shall be done my Lord,” bowed Guiliani Ricasoli, with a comprehensive smile, which

* The Medici lived at the Palazzo Ricciardi, before the Pitti was finished.

however was soon exchanged for a graver expression, as he caught the lowering eye of the Grand Duke flashing on him, as the latter dug his spurs into the flanks of the beautiful and richly caparisoned Andalusian he was riding, and darted forward.

Meanwhile Bianca entered the humble tenement that was henceforward to be her home, and as the door closed upon her, Giovanni Bonaventuri advanced cap in hand, and with great respect took her hand and raised it to his lips,—“Welcome, sweet Lady,” said the old man, “to what I fear is but a wretched home for one like you.”

There is something (with very few exceptions) so venerable and dignified in gray hair, that it irresistibly claims the deference and respect that mere rank and adventitious circumstances exact in younger persons. Bianca felt the full influence of her father-in-law’s respectable age and unpretending bearing, and hurried on by this feeling, she advanced with a grace peculiarly her own, and gently placing her arm round his neck, said “Nay, caro Padre—Father, dear—it is but a poor welcome and one which holds not long together, that is not circled by an embrace.”

“As much of that as you please, colomba,” said the old man, delightedly imprinting a kiss

upon a much more beautiful mouth than he had ever chiselled, and then added, turning to his son, as he chuckled at his own conceit, "Well, son Pietro, and how fares it with you? But I need not ask how it fares, for I see it *faire* right well, Corpo di Bacco! But it was worth risking thy head, as I hear thou hast done, for such a prize as thou hast secured here;—but my sister awaits us upstairs, and I am sure she will be as happy to see you as I am," continued he with a sigh, as if he did not much relish the idea of the introduction; but offering his arm to Bianca, they passed through the studio, and ascended a not over-wide staircase to a small room that might have passed unnoticed—safe in its insignificance—had it remained as the architect and upholsterer left it. But, no! it was tricked out in every possible and almost impossible manner,—the walls had a perfect eruption of little coloured prints over them—the top of the stove, tables, and brackets, looked like the most trumpery species of roadside altars, from being laden with wax lights of every colour in the rainbow, interspersed with sparkling coloured candied sugar, *bon bons*, little dabby bunches of flowers crammed into *small, very small* baskets, egg cups, miniature washing tubs, saucers, &c., &c.; in short, the whole place was redolent of meanness, affecta-

tion, and ultra-vulgarity,—or in other words, highly emblematic of the presiding deity, the Signora Sylvestro—the only thing approaching to size in the room, was some old virginals that stood in one corner, and this might be looked upon rather as a type of the owner's colossal vanity, than of her taste; for doubtless she would have curtailed its dimensions if she could; as it was, she was indefatigable in strumming on it, accompanying the same with another species of noise, which she called singing.

She was one of those persons who scrupulously concealed their age, except when she sang, and then it might have been accurately ascertained by the *forty-eight* quivers with which she harnessed every note; for when chanting, she shook so desperately that she always appeared to labour under an ague of the voice. In person, the Signora Emilia Sylvestro was a short dumpy woman, laced exceedingly tight to produce a small waist, which had also the effect of producing an unusually full bust, where that personal defect already exceeded. The skin of her neck was red and coarse, as that of women of her age is apt to be, but that of her short, cat-like face, was still redder and still coarser, especially the nose and forehead—but there are no effects without causes in this

world—her eyes were large and of a pale drab colour, exceedingly wandering and uncertain in their expression, and never able to meet those of the person to whom she spoke; of her hair and teeth she was if possible more vain than of the rest of her person, and sooth to say they were the least bad points about her,—save that the former she disfigured by not dressing it according to the prevailing mode, but after frizzling it with a wilderness of little attenuated ringlets, still further torturing the same by lading them with a whole pedlar's pack of penny ribbons, brass pins, and artificial flowers—thus attired, she laboured under the monomania of considering herself “the cynosure of wondering eyes,” (as indeed in a manner she was, but not in the manner she supposed) and consequently her entrée into a room was a Mosaic of wriggling, downcast eyes, and simpering, irresistibly ridiculous. Elocution was her forte, so that her pronunciation of certain words was unique; for no one before or since ever pronounced them in a similar manner. She was exceedingly fond of talking of great people, whose names she invariably mispronounced.

But the Signora Sylvestro was clever in a way, for she had the happy art of getting something out of every one, and never giving

anything—not even thanks—in return ; as by an inverse ratio of reasoning peculiarly her own, whatever others did to serve her, was, according to her construction, merely another mode of serving themselves:—thus, if some charitable priest, or skilful leech, gave his whole time and attention, gratis, and even sat up o' nights through a long illness with herself or her sposo, she would observe with a patronizing air, “That it was of great benefit to men of that profession to see such cases !” and thus she showed her generalship and with a breath expunged an obligation that might have weighed upon an ordinary individual for life. Her charity and benevolence, as far as *words* went, were unbounded ; but she was clearly of St. James' opinion—that charity did not consist in almsgiving—for she never gave any, no, not a doit ! But would be seized with a pious horror if the smallest sum was laid out in a collar, or body-coat, for a dog, benevolently asserting the great service the same sum might have been to some poor person ! though it never seemed to strike her that the comparatively large capital which she daily invested in penny ribbons, brass pins, and artificial flowers, would have been equally beneficial so bestowed.

Of all the heroines of antiquity, the one she appeared most to emulate was Zuleika,

(better known as Mrs. Potiphar), and woe to the unhappy Josephs she encountered, as her rancour and plots against them were of the most violent kind; for with an assumed feline softness of manner, her treachery and her claws were equally cat-like. One of her most flagrant traits of vulgarity was, that servants were infallible and could do no wrong,—but then, as we have before said, there is no effect without a cause, or in other words, there is a reason for every thing in this world—and when people's actions, from the smallest to the greatest, will not exactly bear daylight, it is just as well to conciliate servants who have very sharp tongues when they choose to use them; and so far the Signora Sylvestro's plan of awarding them infallibility, succeeded; for hers were remarkably smooth to her face, though she might have been somewhat astounded had she heard the terms in which they spoke of her behind her back. The only difference that subsisted between her and her husband, was some ten years; in all things else, good easy man, he saw with her eyes, heard with her ears, and tasted with her palate; for if he complained of his porridge being too hot, too cold, too salt, or too much the reverse, he was instantly made to read his recantation, by her fiat going forth of “No, dear, it isn't, its only *your fancy*; for the

cook always seasons it just as it should be." Nay, more, at a minute's notice she would make him think his best friend, his worst enemy, and he would proceed without loss of time to insult and maltreat him accordingly. But her talents extended even further than this; for the poor good man being somewhat of a bigot, and theology being the only point upon which he tenaciously adhered to his own opinions, she had sometimes a difficult card to play, in persuading him that the most worthless and worldly of her own sex, and the most profligate of the other—when constituting her particular cronies—were saints and angels! still, juggler-like, she had—*mirable dictu!*—only to make the assertion, and to her husband's well and habitually-deluded vision, it became *fact!*

And now, having introduced this amiable lady to the reader, it is high time we should introduce her to Bianca. On the evening of the arrival of the latter, the Signora Sylvestro wore an unusually tight fardingale, and also shone out in an extra array of rainbow-hued streamers—"tinkling cymbals, sounding brass," and artificial flowers, while the virginals were ready opened for a display of her musical talents. Having heard much of Bianca's beauty, she stole many a furtive glance at the narrow mirror that surmounted the stove, as she heard

the fair Venetian's footstep on the stairs—saying with a leer, and a simper, as she adjusted her complicated head gear, “I wonder if she is at all in my style or *per r r r*fectly different?” for among her other elegancies of diction, the Signora rang out her r's like cathedral *bells* in a county town at an election. “And Pietro, poor boy!” continued she, “how *desperately* in love with me he was six years ago, before I went to India!”—Six years ago, Pietro was just fifteen.—“Well, I wonder what sort of a thing his wife is?” She had not long to wonder, for at that moment Bianca entered, and Giovanni Bonaventuri presented her in due form to his sister, who simpered, coloured, wriggled, cringed, and patronized all in one movement, as she advanced to salute her new niece; while her reception of her nephew bespoke as plainly as look could do so, a compassionate hope that he had not rashly come back to throw himself into the temptation of her charms! against which her elephantine vanity did not consider his young and lovely bride the slightest safeguard.

As the Signora Emilia had told her sposo that he need not appear till supper time, he did not of course dare to do so.

On the evening in question her attempts at shining, and conciliating Bianca, produced any-

thing but the intended effect; never had the latter in her whole life felt so uncomfortable, and so ill at ease. Is it that "coming events" do really "cast their shadows before," and that instinct implants within us a forewarning of the treacherous and the deceitful, which, however, they may flatter, and outwardly cringe to us, makes our better judgment reject, and our better taste dislike them?

Good heavens! *felt* Bianca, though she would not own to herself even that such were her thoughts as she involuntarily recoiled from the wandering hypocritical and unpleasant light drab-coloured eyes of the Signora Sylvestro; "And am I doomed to pass the rest of my life with this servile, yet serpent-like woman, who looks more from her ridiculous, over-dressed appearance, as if she were going to exhibit on the tight-rope, than like the wife of a respectable citizen. Nor did her efforts to play the agreeable, by running over an inventory of fine people, whose names Bianca found it impossible to recognise under the incognito of her pronunciation, at all help to diminish her discomfort. Her father in law, on the contrary, assumed nothing, and she therefore felt grateful, for the unaffected kindness with which he expressed a hope, that she would not find her

life too dull, but that his present situation was a much gayer one, than where he had formerly lived. The house then occupied by Giovanni Bonaventuri was on the Piazza del Duomo, opposite the Baptistery.

Supper was at length announced, but who could describe it? the Signora Sylvestro's suppers were invariably bad parodies on her dinners, and verily, vulgar people, are never at the climax of their vulgarity till they get to their gastronomic arrangements.

Oh! Poverty! or what is called, a reverse of fortune, among the many bitter ingredients that thou hast in thy most bitter cup, thou hast not one so insupportably bitter as that which brings us in close and hourly contact with the earthenware and huckaback beings of the nether world. Even the vulgarity of inanimate things it requires time to get accustomed to; but living, breathing, bustling, plotting, planning, human, vulgarity, is a species of moral ipecacuanha enough to destroy any temper. This poor Bianca was doomed to experience, as every day hers was tried more and more; she could not suddenly leave the room but she would stumble over the Signora Sylvestro wooing an ear-ache, by the close application of

that feature to the key-hole ; did she ask for a cup of coffee, or a glass of wine and water, they were sure to be brought to her by the Signora herself, ready mixed, lest she should exceed in either potation, for all excesses should be restricted to ourselves. Or, if an uncontrollable look of disgust stole over her face, at having things brought to her in the very dirty hands of some very dirty servant, without the necessary quarantine of a salver, then had she to listen to animadversions on fine-ladyism by the hour together. And where was her husband on these occasions ? Where husbands generally are, abroad, pursuing his own pleasure and interest ; while his young and beautiful wife was soon installed into her woman's fate of having no companion but the vulture, solitude, to prey upon her heart.

Bonaventuri, from the first week of his arrival at Florence, placed himself under the protection of his former patrons, the Medici ; and the wary Francesco, while he took good to keep his motives to himself, overwhelmed the unsuspecting husband with favours and benefits ; which, in a mind so vain and so weak as Pietro's, effectually laid the foundation of all his pretended benefactor wished, whose only diffi-

culty, must it be confessed, lay with the neglected and unconscious wife ; who, although the Grand Duke had several times personally honoured the elder Bonaventuri's studio, to superintend the progress of the piece of sculpture he had ordered, yet on all such occasions, Bianca kept studiously out of the way. Not so the Signora Sylvestro, who ever found some pretext to seek something she had *not* left in her brother's studio, during the Grand Ducal visits ; while being the only thing he ever descried in the shape of a petticoat, he took her for an old nurse, or some other attendant on Bianca, which induced him to propitiate her by civil looks, and those innumerable little nameless attentions, nothing in themselves, but producing a perfect conflagration when coming in contact with that most inflammable of all tinder—vanity. These, coupled with Francesco's daily hoverings round the house, and nightly serenade, she entirely attributed to the effect of her own charms, and as looks and nods cost nothing, she was most gratefully lavish of them in return ; her silly head reeled at the notion of the conquest she had made. Already she speculated on the public improvements she should make through Florence—the concerts she would give in the ' Boholi'—the dresses she should wear—the cour-

tiers that would be at her feet—trying to supplant their royal master ; but no ! she spurned them all, and nobly determined to remain faithful to the Duke, and though last, not least, she finally resolved to humble the airs of that fine lady, Bianca, by appointing her to be her tire-woman.

Thus rapidly was the fabric of the Signora's aërial castle progressing, when another story was added to it by the following incident :—One day, about six months after Bianca's arrival at Florence, the Duke had suddenly recollected some further alteration he wished made in the work Bonaventuri was completing for him ; and so anxious was he about it, (never had he evinced such a love of the arts before,) that, as usual, he came himself to explain his wishes. He had not been half a minute in the studio, before the Signora Sylvestro made her appearance, in quest of a needle that she had carefully darned into her tapestry frame before she descended. While the poor artist was expatiating with all the enthusiasm of his art, as he pointed with his chisel, and retraced in the air the symmetrical outline figure of Io, that he was creating, his eye sparkling at the idea of, as he supposed, daily increasing in royal favour, the Duke took the opportunity of pressing into

the Signora's hand a paper and a well filled purse ; had not the vapours of vanity been too dense to prevent her perceiving anything, the purse would certainly have opened her eyes as to her not being the object of the royal admiration. But no ! even Francesco's whisper of " Good *gossip*, give this note to the Signora," (so deafened, as well as blinded, was she with vanity,) fell unheeded on her ear ; or what the result of being called good gossip (when the very least she expected was divine honours, as a new and improved personification of Venus,) might have been,—Heaven only knows ; as it was, she hurried away to her own chamber, rolling and heaving like the sea before the appearance of a whale. Arrived there, she proceeded to peruse the note the Grand Duke had intrusted to her, nor were her illusions in the least dispelled, by seeing it addressed

" To the Most Beautiful."

Hastily breaking the seal, and untying the little silver cord that was bound round it, she read with much simpering, and infinite satisfaction, a very amorous sonnet ; which, assuredly, had never been addressed to her.

" It is evident," exclaimed the Signora Sylvestro, still gazing on the Grand Duke's

effusion, "that he has heard me sing, by his mentioning the sweetness of my voice, and comparing it to the breath of flowers." Little did the poor Signora dream that he had indeed heard her screams from the window, and as often consigned them to the infernal regions, as they came harshly between him and the low rich tones of Bianca's voice, as it stole, accompanied by her mandolin, on the evening air. "But," continued she, and raising her drab-coloured orbs to the mirror, "he has made a mistake about my eyes being dark; though, I have no doubt, from the window, and in the shade, where alone he has seen them, they appear *perrrrrfectly* dark." And again she read the verses, making no further comment this time but by repeating the name of "Francesco," and adding, "he has even signed his name to them; so it is evident he glories in his passion for me." After having arrived at this very satisfactory conclusion, the Signora Sylvestro felt precisely as Bonchardon describes himself to have done after reading Homer,—that is, her whole frame appeared to herself to be enlarged, and all nature which surrounded her diminished to atoms. Happy Signora Sylvestro! She belonged to that, luckily for mankind, minority of elderly ladies, who, far

from perceiving the weight of accumulating years, accompanied, as they ever are, by the ravages of time, on the contrary, like the transformed followers of Comus, do

“ Not once perceive their foul disfigurement.

But boast themselves more comely than before.”

That very evening, when the whole family were assembled—all except Pietro, who ever had appointments and engagements with his gay companions about Court—the Grand Duke was as usual hovering incognito about the sculptor’s house to catch a glimpse of, or sound from Bianca, who never once thinking of him, was moodily pondering, as was her wont, on her husband’s frequent and daily lengthening absences, and trying in vain, as she sat in a quiet corner of that small humble room to divert her thoughts—that is, she was endeavouring to read a then new collection of *novelli*, entitled in those days “*Belle Giornata*.” But amusing as most of the stories are, her eyes read the words mechanically, without her imagination ever becoming interested.

But if Francesco was unheeded by her, there were other more compassionate eyes that watched his every movement ; these were the Signora Sylvestro’s, who to relieve him from his evident anxiety and suspense, gently opened

the window and flung down a reply to the verses he had given her in the morning, which the deluded Duke kissed passionately as he caught.

During this little *scena*, any one with tolerable ears within the room (which Bianca had) might have distinguished the words "Zitto! zitto! Marito—qui—" on the part of the Signora Sylvestro, as she closed the window—and even her Marito, good orthodox believer as he was in the exchange of identity between black and white when assured of it by his wife, hearing the sounds, though not exactly the words, did venture to ask what she was saying and doing at the window? to which she replied, in her usual piano and hypocritical voice—

"It was the Angelus ringing, dear, and I was merely repeating a prayer."

"That's right, my love," said this gem of a husband, "never neglect your prayers."

If Bianca could have felt additional disgust for the vulgar little reptile before her, whose whole life was an acted lie, she would have done so at this fresh instance of her combined effrontery and hypocrisy. But sorrow is a monopoliser, and leaves us little room to think of any but ourselves, and latterly, Bianca's life

would have been insupportable but for two events that had taken place, for such they might be truly considered, in an existence so monotonous as hers.

The first of these was, in her daily and constant attendance at prayers at the Duomo she had made the acquaintance of a lady who was a strange anomaly of attraction and repulsion—that is, there was a certain fascination of manner about her which stamped her as a woman of the world, who was evidently the growth and product of good society, and there are few things more attractive and refreshing to those who have been for some time condemned to live in a lazar-house of vulgarity. But notwithstanding this fascination, there was at the same time a boldness and assurance, it might be almost called an effrontery of bearing, that at first startled and then revolted the beautiful and dreamy Venetian—but the next minute, her better judgment would be borne down by the beauty and the brilliancy of her new acquaintance, whose rich red lips seemed to have ripened beneath the sparkling beams of wit that were continually issuing from them, so that the completely fascinated Bianca began to think that if there was occasionally any brass visible in her new friend, it was at all events

Corinthian brass, to form which the fusion of many precious things had gone.

This lady was, in fact, no other than Donna Maraquita della Torre, the before-mentioned sister of Ignatius, and Don Manuel Dragoni. Her Palazzo, which was as luxurious and as gorgeous as herself, being only a short walk from the Piazza del Duomo, and consequently an additional inducement (had any such been wanting) to Bianca to accept the constant and pressing invitations she received from the Signora della Torre, independent of the attractions of whose society, it was a relief to poor Bianca to breathe in rooms like those she had all her life been accustomed to. Yet, although nothing could exceed the kindness of Donna Maraquita, both in words and deeds, for reasons that this our history will disclose in the sequel; yet there was at times an unpleasant tone, for it was more the manner than the matter, in the beautiful Spaniard's conversation that annoyed her—in short, it was the use of the chief mystery in the art of tormenting, never practised but by our *soi-disant* best friends, who are ever privileged to make pincushions of us by forcing the most disagreeable points of our position into us. The whole and sole tendency of every thing that Signora della Torre

said, was to impress the young Venetian with the conviction that she had not a friend in the world beside herself; nor was Bonaventuri's constant absence and neglect forgotten to be duly animadverted upon, with sundry half-uttered inuendoes as to his having found metal more attractive elsewhere; all of which, though apparently heard by her victim, *like one that would not hear*, yet in reality rankled deeply in her heart, as such venom-steeped arrows generally do.

Poor Bianca, too, like all novices in misfortune, or knowledge of the world, which is the same thing, felt keenly the mean and cowardly receding of people, who in Venice would have boasted of a bow from her for six months, till it was succeeded by another—and yet these very same individuals were grown so blind that they jostled her in the streets of Florence, without recognising her sufficiently to return her most courteous salutations! The only one of her former acquaintance, whose kindness never abated, but rather seemed to increase and expand with her fallen fortune, as though it had brought them more upon a level, was Titian, who wrote to her constantly, and from the tact and good feeling which induced him to mention any and every

little incident that might afford a ray of pleasure, and to be equally scrupulous in suppressing whatever might cause a shadow of annoyance; his letters always produced in her mind the same glow and harmony of feeling that his richly blent and unrivalled colouring effected in the tone of his own pictures.

No wonder, then, that Bianca felt chilled and sick at heart, when she would repair to her new friend with tears in her eyes, a flush of pleasure on her cheek, and one of the kind-hearted artist's letters in her hand, boasting that at all events *he* had not deserted her, to receive some sarcastic answer from the beautiful Spaniard (as she sat at her toilette, sipping her chocolate, and undergoing the decoration of a person which derived no aid from ornament), such as—

“Ah, cara mia! how little you know of the world. I much doubt, if Signor Titian were not acknowledged to be the best letter writer of the day, not excepting Cardinal D'Este and the Duke of Alba—I *very* much doubt whether he would be so regular a correspondent of yours, despite your *beaux yeux*.”

It was this detestable habit of attributing the worst motives to the best actions, so common to persons hackneyed in the world and its

ways, that wearied—and as it were withered—the young and as yet fresh heart of Bianca, and made her more than ever regret the gentle companionship of the kind and sympathising Arianna, who went even beyond herself in finding “*good in every thing.*”

It is not then surprising, that in this state of things the other event to which we have alluded should have given an agreeable impetus to the sameness of her existence. It was this: one morning, as she was sitting alone, in her chamber looking vacantly at her embroidery frame, and listlessly prolonging the embryo of a rose-bud that should have been completed at least two days before, the door suddenly opened, and her two little dogs, Fato and Tafano, came bounding forward, followed by Ghirihizzo. An exclamation of delight escaped their mistress, as she took them both in her arms and kissed them alternately, and something more than a smile passed over her face as she beheld the travel-worn and woeful plight of her hitherto spruce dwarf, whose dress now consisted of a threadbare suit of brown fustian completely powdered with dust, and surmounted by a cloak of the same lined with blue camlet; his ruff was of the commonest material, called at the time spider’s web, and looked as if it had

been recently suffering from an attack of the jaundice; instead of his usual velvet cap, with its costly diamond loop and button, and showy plume, his head was covered with a high flower-pot crowned brown felt hat, with one poor sickly moulting-looking red feather, which having been humbled to the dust, with which it was so plentifully covered, would scarcely have appeared red, but that it seemed to blush through the aforesaid dust at its own poverty; a pair of unvarnished doeskin gauntlets (none of the cleanest) covered his hands; and a common black Ferrara rapier, as tall as himself, dangled from his side, while his trunk hose were composed of coarse blue worsted—in short, the only vestiges of his wonted foppery about him were his black Spanish shoes, slashed with what had once been salmon-coloured satin, but which had long yielded to the corrupting influences of mud and dust.

“A thousand pardons, Illustrissima,” said the dwarf, with infinitely more respect than he had ever thrown into his manner in addressing his mistress in her own splendid home—“A thousand pardons for appearing before you in this travel-worn gear, but I thought you would like to see me—I mean the dogs—and therefore I tarried not a moment to change, though I

travelled incognito, as you will perceive, gracious lady," added he, gingerly taking up between the tips of his finger and thumb, with a look of infinite disgust, the edge of his camlet cloak.

"Incognito!" repeated Bianca, with a smile. "But, prithee good—nay, I had almost said *dear*—Ghirihizzo, for by the mass I am marvellously glad to see thee—what has brought thee to Florence?"

"Nay, what should bring me but your gracious self, lady?" replied the poor dwarf, with a slight tone of disappointment, that Bianca did not at once divine before she was made acquainted with it, the great sacrifice he had made in walking from Fuzino to Florence to rejoin her.

"Alas! poor knave, I thank thee for thy zeal, but art ignorant that I am no longer a *Gran Dama*? but the wife of a poor citizen,—and poverty, child, is no jest! and therefore needs no jester; besides," continued she, turning the sigh with which she had uttered the last sentence into a smile.—"Were I to flaunt it at vespers, or at the Boholi, or in the Corso, or even in the Prato before sun-rise of a May morning, with my dwarf, forsooth, ha! ha! ha! why every bell in Florence would ring without

pulling, from the mere echo of the people's laughter."

"And let them ring," said Ghirihizzo, moodily, "thank heaven I know nothing of what the modes may be among citizens' wives; I only come to resume my service with Count Cappello's daughter?"

"My poor fool!" sobbed Bianca, as the tears now coursed each other down her cheeks, "and is it possible thou art so recently from Venice, and yet doth not know that Count Cappello hath said that I am no longer his daughter?"

"Aye, marry do I, and know perchance, more foolish things that have been said and done in Venice, than that. But what then? the Count's saying it cannot prevent your being his daughter, any more than *your* saying Ghirihizzo—*poor* Ghirihizzo! is no longer your fool, can prevent his being so: can it, madam?" and here the poor dwarf knelt down, and coaxingly taking Bianca's hand, began patting his own shoulder with it, as he added.—"There, there, I knew it was all right, and that you would not have the heart to send poor Nano away."

"Nay, nay, kneel not to me, the truth is, since it must be told, I am too poor, good knave, to keep thee now."

“If you mean in point of salary, Signora,” said the dwarf, drawing himself up with the air of a giant, advancing his right foot, and placing his hand upon his hip, “I have long been of opinion, that money is a mill-stone, and I attribute my never having attained to the ungainly height of other men; entirely to the heavy purses, with which, thanks to your and your noble family’s bounty, I have been all my life weighed down; therefore henceforth I renounce the filthy lucre of gain, had I sought it, I might now have been in the service of the Signora Elena Cappello, but no! I even rejected on the same grounds, a far more tempting offer from the Contessa Incredia D’Este, being resolved, like the Troubadours, only to serve ‘*par amour*.’”

“My poor fool,” said Bianca smiling through her tears, and patting the dwarf on the head; “thy devotion merits a better reward than sharing my misfortunes, yet I will not thwart thee, for I know by experience, that the heart is ever obstinate in chasing its own sorrow; but sooth to say I am but ill at ease here myself; and I fear it may fare still worse with thee.”

“Oh let Ghirihizzo alone for that, lady, he generally conducts himself upon the plan of

foxes and conquerors, that is to say, he makes a way where he does not find one, and teaches the doctrine of community of goods wherever he goes. But now that I have again the happiness of being in your service, Signora ; I'll hie me to the Locanda, which is close by, and exchange this fustian for more suitable habiliments."

"Nay, but thou hast not told me yet how thou didst travel — didst ride?" and Bianca smiled at the idea of the dwarf on horseback, "or come in a coach?"

"Neither, lady," replied Ghirihizzo, complacently rubbing his well bowed right leg—" *we* Venetians, you know, do not sin on the side of horse-flesh, witness our ambassador's late exploits at Madrid, which I heard Don Gomez de Sylva laughing over the night before I left Venice."

"And what may they have been, good knave? but cheat not Padua out of the honour of being thy birth-place, by saying *we* Venetians."

"For that matter, Signora, though a man's birth is certainly the first accident that befalls him, yet is it but a secondary consideration, compared to his breeding, and as I was bred at Venice, I always give the preference to that city, and call myself Venetian. But the story

of our ambassador at Madrid runs thus:— There being a bull-fight at court, all the ambassadors were to go in state, that is, mounted on finely caparisoned horses ; and amongst the rest the Duca di Trevisani, our ambassador, who thought he was quite safe on the back of a sleek ambling fat jennet, that he himself had selected, from an idea that if it did commit any fault, it could only be that of standing still, and going to sleep : and indeed, as far as the horse was concerned, his confidence was by no means misplaced ; but it so happened, that one of the two running footmen that followed behind, to urge on the steed, in administering the whip ; once aimed too high, and cut the ambassador sharply across the shoulders. ‘ Merciful powers ! ’ exclaimed the Duke di Trevisani, clearing the horse’s head at one bound, and jumping into a pool of mud that seemed placed there purposely for his reception, ‘ Merciful powers ! *how this brute of a horse does kick !* ’ ”

“ Poor Trevisani ! ” laughed Bianca, “ he must indeed have looked truly ridiculous ; but there is no end to the jests made upon the equestrian mistakes of we poor Venetians, and yet it cannot be expected that a people who have no horses beyond four bronze ones should

know how to ride ; but thou hast not yet told me how thou camest hither?"

"I walked, lady, and but for the little fatigue of occasionally carrying the dogs, it was nothing more than a pleasant pastime ; but I must now walk a little farther to make myself worthy of your presence." And so saying, Ghirihizzo quitted the room as abruptly as he had entered it, but returned in less than an hour, redolent of ambergris, and "glittering as a birth-night beau" in one of his most *recherché*, and *point de vice* suits.

Although Bianca amply defrayed the expense of the addition of the poor dwarf to her father-in-law's establishment, yet it was not to be supposed, that among the many meanderings of the Signora Sylvestro's vulgarity, it should not take the very common one of extreme niggardliness ; so that had not Ghirihizzo been quite capable of protecting himself, he would have stood a good chance of being starved. And yet in reality she was delighted at his arrival, for she thought by appearing in public with a dwarf in her train, she might be mistaken for a *Gran Dama*, and so be more worthy of the regal conquest she had made ! Though truth compels us to own, that she paid dearly for her vanity in this instance, for the incorrigible Ghi-

rihizzo, who read her character at half a glance, and therefore considered her as his legitimate property, never consented to accompany her abroad, without playing her some impish trick that turned her into a public jest.

Meanwhile Bianca began to experience an additional source of annoyance in the persecuting attentions of a Cavaliero, who always occupied the praying cushion next to her.

Already had she carried her devotions from the Duomo to the Santissima Annunziata ; from the Santissima Annunziata to Santa Croce ; from Santa Croce to San Minato ; and from San Minato to nearly every other church in Florence, but still in less than a week her last retreat was sure to be discovered by her persevering tormentor, who, we need scarcely say, was Francesco de Medici. He, in his turn, was much mystified by the warmth of the effusions he privately received from the Signora Sylvestro (supposing them, as he did, to emanate from Bianca), and contrasting them with her coy and distant manner, and her evidently unaffected wish to avoid him whenever they met. But in this dilemma we must at present leave him, and return to some other personages in this history.

CHAPTER III.

"Slight are the outward signs of evil thought,
Within—within, 'twas there, the Spirit wrought !
Love shows all changes—Hate ! Ambition ! Guile !
Betray no farther than the bitter smile."

LORD BYRON.

"How long wilt thou continue to take pleasure in sin ?
Repentance is not unpalatable——taste it."

PERSIAN POETRY.

IGNATIUS DRAGONI had not been idle during the time he had remained in Florence. No sooner had Don Manuel recruited his health and spirits, than he dispatched him to Spain with his dearly bought information about the Azores, thinking that his own country was the safest sphere for one of his limited views and small ambition. While he himself remained in Italy, playing at cup and ball, as it were, with the courts of Tuscany and France, which he ultimately hoped to make the instruments of

his vague and never-relinquished schemes of vengeance against Venice. This it was that made him doubly anxious to rid himself of his brother's presence; for, as we have before stated, the only touch of tenderness in his nature, was his feeling for that brother; and anything that tends to humanize, soften, or improve the disposition, is sure to unnerve the mind for the crooked, dark, and iron paths of ambition. This Ignatius felt, and therefore resolved to tear the weakness from him. From his acquaintance, made accidentally at the little Inn of the *Tre Delfini*, with Martin Bernardini, the Gonfaloniere, which had grown into the closest intimacy, he had, through the interest of the latter, been appointed Confessor to the Grand Duke, the Ricci family, and several other of the most influential Florentine Nobles; which was precisely the first and most important move he desired to make in the game he was playing;—a game in which he found his sister Donna Maraquita, an able coadjutrix. —*She* also grew in daily favour with the Duke, and Ignatius was little scrupulous or fastidious as to the means.—The very first fruits of this favour, were, her removal from her small house on the Piazza del Duomo, to a splendid Palazzo in the Via del Cocomero.

Things were thus progressing, when an event occurred beyond his most sanguine expectations:—namely, the elopement of Bianca Cappello, with Pietro Bonaventuri! Here was a judgment on the proud and haughty Cappellos!—the flower of the Venetian nobles—with a vengeance! Then the arrival of the misguided girl in Florence!—better, and better still! It was not long before he learned, not only through the medium of his sister, but also by that of public report, of Francesco's admiration of the beautiful Venetian. She had degraded herself once by a *més-alliance*, and the Jesuit vowed it should not be his fault if she was not more thoroughly degraded a second time. With Bonaventuri, whose vanity kept him constantly hovering about Court, he formed an extreme intimacy; and having with his hawk's-eye—which nothing escaped—soon discovered Pietro's desertion and neglect of his young and beautiful wife, he determined to improve the breach, by introducing the handsome and inflammable, but heartless husband, to the fascinating Contessa Ricci, who soon reciprocated Bonaventuri's undisguised admiration. In doing this, Ignatius had no defined or fixed purpose; but he knew that out of such unlawful connexions, mischief and misery

generally spring; and no one ever had such a consummate genius for seizing and improving the opportunities that grow out of particular events and circumstances;—besides, the present *primum mobile* of all his movements was to degrade Bianca, and break her heart.

But we must allow events to develop themselves; and for the present, accompany the Jesuit to Martin Bernardini's—who had appointed him to be at his apartments in the Palazzo Vacchio, at ten o'clock—nor was it the first appointment by some dozen, that the Gonfaloniere had made with him, both in the confessional, and in the privacy of his own chamber, without, apparently, being able to “screw his courage” into unburdening his mind of the “perilous stuff” that evidently encumbered it.

It was a lovely night in June, and the Piazza del Gran Duca was flooded with that silver blaze of moonlight, that has always appeared to me fuller and broader in that old square, than in any other spot in the world;—while the statues seem to grow out of it, like beings of its own creation, who have chosen that time and place to congregate and commune with each other. Although the streets of Florence were scarcely as quiet at night in the sixteenth century as they are in these our days, yet, at

that—according to the fashion of the times—late hour, there were few footsteps astir; and few sounds afloat to break the stillness of the air, except it might be the dying cadences of a serenade under some neighbouring window, or the spasmodic groan of a stilettoed passenger in an adjacent street.

Despite ourselves, external nature always asserts her power over us; and even Ignatius threw back his cowl, as he paused for a moment and drank in the quiet beauty of the scene.—‘Why is it,’ thought he, ‘that we are cursed with a twin existence?—our senses are the denizens of our external life, and *there* all is enjoyment, for all is beauty in its myriad forms;—whether we perceive it through the medium of our eyes, ears, or the delicious fragrance of the thousand flowers that strew even the most rugged path; but from this fragment of Eden that is still ours, we are eternally torn away by our passions, which are the insurgent habitants of our bustling, jarring, warring, malcontent, disaffected, struggling *life within*. “But, tush!—why do I stand moralizing here? Moonlight and the delicate air of a midsummer’s night, are only fitting food for lovers, and nightingales! I must seek fare more substantial for the supplies of the inner world!” So saying, he

strode hastily across the Piazza, and entered the old palace, along whose gloomy corridors, and silent staircases, the lamps burnt dimly. Arrived at the top of the first flight of steps, he entered the large gallery, which was unlighted, save by the broad stream of moonlight that came through the high old windows. His sandals being intimately acquainted with every vein of marble on the well-worn floor, needed no other light or guide, but walked firmly across to the door on the right-hand side; where, raising the curtain, he traversed the short passage which leads to, what is now, the audit or council room, but which was in those days, the *Gabinetto segreto* of the Gonfaloniere. Ignatius knocked gently at the door:—no one bid him enter, but in less than a second it was hastily opened by Martin Bernardini himself, who had been restlessly pacing up and down the room, as though the haste of his own movements could accelerate those of the person whom he expected.

The Gonfaloniere was about fifty years old, somewhat above the middle height, of a slight and well proportioned figure, with a fair complexion, and light hair; the redundancy of which time had in some degree thinned. His features were cast in the mould that tells false-

hoods in favour of the past; that is, as they progressed in years they gave the beholder to suppose that they had possessed more beauty in youth, than had in reality ever fallen to their share. His eyes were blue, and when excited by sudden anger, assumed that fearful paleness—like lava, burnt white—which light blue eyes are so apt to do. In the angry flash of a dark eye, there is at least something natural; but from the icy witherings of enraged light eyes, heaven defend all poor mortals! His mouth and teeth were his best features, for there was a precision in the former, and an equality and brilliancy in the latter, which, when he smiled, gave him a pleasing expression, despite his nose being one of those aquiline assurances of the obstinacy, and *hauteur* of the owner. He wore a surcoat, or corselet, of steel armour, which was clasped at the shoulders with small burnished gold antique clasps, of the most delicate workmanship. Below this corselet fell a tunic of scarlet velvet, while on his legs were greaves of polished steel-chain armour.

“You are welcome, Padre! I thought you would never come,” said Martin Bernardini, flinging himself into a chair, and pointing to another opposite for the Jesuit.

“And yet, I believe,” replied Ignatius, “I

lack not punctuality, for the palace clock chimed the first stroke of ten as I crossed the Piazza."

"Ah,—it may be so,—but I feel," said the Gonfaloniere, passing his hand tightly over his eyes, as if to shut out some painful vision, "I feel as if I should not tell you all to-night, that I should die with it untold."

Ignatius, who never lost an opportunity of appearing magnanimously stern, and piously plain-spoken, whenever he was sure of his victim, though always *suaviter in modo* till he had got them into his power, now spread out his hands in an exhorting and supplicating manner, as he exclaimed—"And why not my son disburden your soul to-night? For the present alone is ours; the next hour death may demand his due, which he has a right to claim at any moment; and you know those fine lines of Seneca's,—

" Illi mors gravis incubat,
Qui notus nimis omnibus,
Ignotus moritur sibi."

"Nay, nay, not quite that either," groaned Martin Bernardini, "for, however well others may know me—alas! I know myself still better; but we lose time," added he with a great effort, as if to control some powerful feeling, and then continued, "you are aware, Padre, that I

have excluded from office every man who had not an hereditary share in the sovereignty of the republic.* You are also aware that, when the Bentivogli swayed the republic of Bologna, Annibal Bentivoglio was assassinated in 1445, by bravos armed by the Pope and the Duke of Milan; Cosmo de Medici then supplied the Bolognese with another Bentivoglio, by disclosing an affair of gallantry which one of the name had had with a Florentine lady of Burgher family (of the name of Ferrai), the result of which was a son, who went by the name of San Cascese. This base born caitiff, Cosmo caused to be received as the head of the Bolognese republic; for the time had arrived when the influence of the Medici was to prevail over the legal power of the Florentine Signoria, in which they might transmit their usurped power, not only to their legitimate children, but like the Bentivogli, also to their spurious descendants. Cosmo, as you know, felt no kind of

* This was one of Martin Bernardini's first acts as Gonfaloniere; and yet of these hereditary legislators, there were not, in the year 1600, more than 168; and at the last enumeration made in 1797, there were only 88. They were nevertheless to furnish a Signoria, composed of a Gonfaloniere, nine Anziani, a Senate of thirty-six members, and a Grand Council of Ninety!—Which was certainly somewhat on the Irishman's financial system of spending, "Half-a-crown out of sixpence a day."

sympathy for the newly forming republic of Milan, which vainly endeavoured to awaken in Italy the ancient enthusiasm for liberty.* He was jealous too of the republic of Venice, which appeared to him to aspire to the dominion of the whole peninsula. By way of counterpoise he promised Francesco Sforza the throne of Milan; but I need not go further into the details of these times, having told you enough for my purpose.

“ Seeing the fatal effects of the anarchy produced by the sovereign power delegated to all those bastard influences, which set the dregs of the people always upon aspiring to the position

* I fear Martin Bernardini was scarcely capable of such a liberal sentiment, but in putting it into his mouth I have only placed him, like the rest of his countrymen, under a great obligation to the enlightened, and admirable Sismondi, with whose words I have here made free. Alas! since writing the above I have returned to Geneva and experienced the real sorrow of finding that excellent man and able historian J. C. L. de Sismondi no more, a good man's epitaph is in the regret of every heart that knew him, and a great one's in the many-tongued mouth of an impartial and grateful posterity; the twin eulogium is his; for he was both a good and a great man, and exertions so virtuous and successful as Sismondi's even in this world reaped that best reward,

“ *Magnum iter intendo; sed dat mihi gloria vires.*”

He deeply lamented, and those who survive him must lament it still more, that he was not spared five years longer to finish his history of France.

of us nobles, I became an inveterate aristocrat, and resolved upon attaining to the position which I now fill, in order to weed the Signoria of all such as had not an hereditary right to be there; you may, therefore, imagine what was my horror, when some eighteen years ago I discovered my brother Carlo Bernardini, for whom I had formed great projects, and among others, intended him to marry an Aldolrandini, (Guilietta Aldolrandini), had contracted a private marriage with a mere plebeian, Arianna Paccini, the great grand-daughter of San Cascese in the female line. Rage! resentment! frenzy! are all too poor, too placid, to express what I felt at this discovery; but let that pass. Now mark!" continued the Golfaloniere, approaching his chair nearer the Jesuit's, whose wrist he tightly grasped, as he lowered his voice, which became so husky as to be almost inaudible, while large drops stood upon his forehead, "mark what follows,—Carlo Bernardini died soon after, some say—(for there are ever busy tongues astir, excavating even the secrets of the grave,)—some say not without suspicion of poison, but mind, *I say not so*,—yet what if it were? murder is the crime of our times—"

"Clearly," interrupted Ignatius, in the same

calm tone that he would have assented to a well worked mathematical problem.

“ My brother dead,” continued the Gonfaloniere, “ the Signora Paccini, in the course of nature, became a widow ; but being also on the eve of becoming a mother, I had *pity on her*, and provided another father for her child.” Here he gave way to a low, convulsive, ironical, inward laugh, that seemed to issue from his chest and shoulders, judging by their movement, as he continued, “ That is, I insisted upon her marrying a coarse varlet of the name of Ferrai, a jeweller on the Ponte Vecchio, as I told her it was a pity so *illustrious* a name should go out of her family, Cascese’s mother having borne it. I then banished them to Venice, first swearing to her a solemn oath that her child when born should soon be sent to join its father, if she did not bring it up scrupulously as the offspring of the jeweller ; while to him I promised all the torments of the Inquisition, if he ever betrayed the truth, and these inauspicious nuptials I myself witnessed, at midnight, in the Church of Santa Croce, where I have so often tried, but in vain, to disclose to you these facts ; for there is something in the air of those dreary aisles that falls upon me like a curse, the very chaunting of the

choir, in *my* ear, is transformed to the shrieks with which the cloisters rang at that bridal; and even the mute statues add their reproaches, by seeming, to my distempered vision, like the lifeless victim which I had helped, some eighteen years ago, to drag to and from that altar. You tell me she is dead,—it may be so,—dead to all but me! but never does sleep, like a good Samaritan, come to visit my weary eyes, but she is ever there to snatch it from me! This foretaste of hell is insupportable.”

“Alas! my son,” said Ignatius, soothingly, “memory is the worst fiend that we have to contend with in our limited brain. Were this poor lady still living, I would counsel you to make to her every atonement in your power, but as it is,”

“The atonement,” interrupted the Gonfaloniere, hastily, “must be to her child. Tell me, is it a son? If so, I shall yet have something to live for, all that I *would* have done for his father, all that I *could* have done for my own, had not God in his justice snatched them from me, Heaven is my witness, I will now do for him. Speak, have I a nephew?”

“I grieve to be the herald of bad tidings,” said Ignatius, assuming a voice almost of tenderness, “but you have not,—”

“What, dead too!” groaned Martin Ber-

nardini, "but it is just; year after year my own were taken, till I became childless, and all that I would have impiously destroyed has been in mercy taken too."

"Nay, not so, my son," said the Jesuit, who had the tact not to inform him suddenly and without preface of Arianna's existence; "listen to me, and there may yet be a ray of comfort that you do not expect. I have often told you how I became acquainted with this Ferrai, the goldsmith, at Venice, and from my acquaintance with him, I naturally reaped this much of his history. It appeared that he had arrived and settled in Venice some eighteen years ago with a very beautiful wife, who was, to all appearance, in every respect superior to himself. A week after her arrival, she became the mother of a little girl. She had no sooner recovered from her confinement, than the Contessa Cappello, who had also had a daughter at the same time, saw her, and charmed with the superiority of her appearance, added to her exceeding beauty, entreated her to become the nurse of her child, an office which, report says, she readily accepted, to escape from the presence of her coarse, and some say brutal, husband, whom she evidently loathed. Be that as it may, from the day of the Contessa's proposal, she and her child were

domiciled in the Palazzo Cappello, where, after having nursed the Signorina Bianca, she only survived a year—but the Contessa promised her on her death-bed that she would never lose sight of the young Arianna, and for the ten years the noble lady lived, she religiously kept her word, for Ferrai's reputed daughter was brought up as the companion of the Signorina Bianca, with whom she shared every advantage of education, so that all her life she has escaped the polluting association of her reputed father."

"Then she is now at Florence with young Bonaventuri's wife?" said Martin Bernardini, almost gasping for breath.

"Alas! no," replied Ignatius, "not quite so near at hand; but I can soon find out from Bonaventuri whether she remained in Venice, or where she now tarries."

"And having found that out," said the Gonfaloniere, "if you will yourself undertake to bring her to me, you shall find that it was worth your while to have made Martin Bernardini your debtor!"

"My son, my poor services are ever at your disposal, and in this instance I shall look upon my hottest zeal as a duty I owe to God more than as a service rendered to you; but from the little I have seen of the Signora Arianna,

I much fear she will not consent to accompany me unless I can produce some more indisputable credentials than my simple assertions as to her parentage."

"Those," replied his companion, rising and unlocking one of the iron boxes that stood on the table—"those you shall have, as far as her father's picture and the certificate of her mother's marriage with him go—and also a letter from myself; yet still, if there is any one whose artifices she has reason to fear, she may even doubt the authenticity of these, for they can bring no proofs to one who is totally ignorant of the facts which they certify."

"True," said Ignatius musingly, "and the rumour ran in Venice, that she was cruelly beset by the lawless overtures of Vittorio Cappello. If so, now that she has quitted his sister, she may fancy that all this is but a deeply laid scheme of Vittorio to get her into his power, and so, with honest prudence, refuse to be caught in what she may with great reason consider a snare. Well—well! I must only shape my course as circumstances may point out."

"Another difficulty also arises," said the Gonfaloniere, "should she be still in Venice—you will scarcely like venturing thither?"

“Pardon me, my son,” replied the Jesuit, with an ill-suppressed laugh, “I should on the contrary much like to have an opportunity of saying an *“Ave”* over every stone in Venice, out of sheer gratitude for the echoless silence they kept the night I effected Manuel’s escape; and if they ever recognise in me either of their old acquaintances, Jose Agnado, or Frate Geronimo, why then may I die unshrived.”

It is doubtful whether Ignatius would have ventured to be so facetious, but that Martin Bernardini was pacing up and down the room with folded arms, evidently buried in his own thoughts, and not heeding the Jesuit’s reply to his previous observation. Stopping suddenly he now said—

“You have then seen this young girl——*my niece*?—what may she be like?”

Ignatius, who had really admired (with that involuntary homage which the highest style of beauty exacts from all) the goldsmith’s daughter, made it a point to increase his admiration for the Gonfaloniere’s niece.

“It is not easy,” said he, “to liken one to anything whose like I have never seen, but as a general description, I should say, that she is fair as a May morning—and in her bearing, gentle and delicate as maiden well may be.”

“Fair, is she! I’m glad of it—’tis the best dower a girl can have! I’ll see that her’s be well bestowed.”

“Take heed, my son, that you garner not up future disappointments, by too prematurely wedding, through no other medium but your own resolves, your fair niece to greatness; for the proudest heritage of beauty that woman ever yet possessed, will not advance her one step nearer to the world’s high places, if it be mortgaged by her spendthrift heart to some poor serf to whom she’s pledged her all; witness Count Cappello’s daughter—none could be fairer! few more nobly born! yet this rich argosy of Nature’s freighting was wrecked upon a low-born worthless knave, through the blind yearnings of a wayward girl.”

“True—too true,” said Martin Bernardini, with a groan, “and for the future compulsion must not be among my weapons; but I think you said this Bonaventuri was in correspondence with my niece, and that you could learn from him where she now sojourns?”

“That can I. But I much doubt his corresponding with her—or rather his wife’s doing so; for although they have now been more than a year at Florence, the Venetian republic still continues to offer a price for Bonaven-

turi's head, and it was only yesterday that the younger Medici told me that a band of bravos, armed by the Cappellos, were secreted in Florence, ever on the watch for his life, which, thanks to his favour with the Grand Duke, and his own precautions in never venturing out even in noon-day unattended, they have hitherto been unable to succeed in obtaining. However, with regard to the Signorina Arianna, her place of abode is easily ascertained; but it strikes me, my son, that the most authentic document I can convey to her, touching her real parentage, will be for you to write to Ferrai, dispatching a trusty messenger with the same, commanding him by that power you have always exercised over him, to declare by a letter on his part, to his hitherto reputed daughter, the perfect truth of all you have advanced with regard to her birth."

"Ha! a good and sapient notion, father," replied the Gonfaloniere, "and worthy of your superior wisdom;—but a sudden cloud, in the shape of one dark misgiving, hath on the instant arisen before it—may not the scurvy knave defy me, secure in the protection of the Venetian states, which he must know the power of our republic reaches not?"

“ It might be so; my son, did not the fears of the vulgar ever outstrip their judgment, by reason of the coward blood that curdles round their hearts, as the unerring token of their low origin.”

“ And yet,” said the Gonfaloniere, with a faint smile, “ I have seen as much cowardice in those, whose almost imperial names should have shielded them from the very suspicion of so beggarly a vice !”

“ Then depend upon it, my son, the name was all they had ; a mystery that becomes perfectly intelligible, when we recollect it is in the power of one woman to taint the race of a Colonna, or a Charlemagne ! Since the rare instances in ancient Rome, Italy never has been, and I fear never will be, celebrated for the production of Lucretias ; for it has too many of the descendants of those against whom Titus framed his ineffectual laws.”

“ What you assert, Padre, is one of those unfortunate truths that no foresight can prevent, and no wisdom can legislate for. But we lose time ! I will this night write to the Venice goldsmith ; in a few days I shall have his answer ;—and then, father, only promise me that I can count upon *your* services, and you shall command *mine*.”

“I have already told you, my son, that you have only to express your wishes to have them obeyed, as far as I am concerned. With regard to your reciprocal offers of assistance, I thank you; but you are aware that none of our order lack either gold or advancement; but there are many minor adjuncts necessary to the security of both, and to these you can occasionally help me;—for instance, I shall, some time hence, have occasion to visit the court of France, and I would go armed with letters from Cosmo Primo’s own hand, to Catherine de Medici, and the Marèchal de Retz; and your interest, my son, might procure me these.”

“At all events,” replied the Gonfaloniere, “it shall be exerted, though I vouch not for its success; so totally has Cosmo released himself from the trammels of government, since he resigned the sovereign power into the hands of Francesco; and, indeed, he is so childishly engrossed by that invention of his, the fabric of Pietra Dura, that it appears to me that both his mental and physical strength are almost gone.”

“Still,” returned the Jesuit, with an ironical smile, “there is enough of Cosmo de Medici left to serve my purpose, or rather that of our holy religion; for what Tacitus said of Tiberius,

may with truth be said of him, namely,—that
‘Though his strength and constitution began to fail, yet his dissimulation continues as perfect as ever.’”

“No wonder,” said Martin Bernardini, bitterly, “for dissimulation being his very soul, and consequently his immortal part, it is not, of course, subject to the mouldering laws of dull decay, so omnipotent over the grosser portion of our nature. But, as I know even now he sometimes inquires about the League, and asks whether Catherine has yet taken a more decided and staunch part against the Huguenots, I shall, perhaps, have the less difficulty in getting your wishes acceded to. And now, for the present, farewell, father!—I need scarcely remind you that the matters I have disclosed to you this night, will rest with you, and never reach other ears; for to all men I would still appear as I ever have done—one as far beyond their scrutiny as their comprehension.” So saying, he arose, and unfastening the door, held it open to let the Jesuit pass.

“You may rely, my son, upon all being as safe as though it had been uttered in the Confessional,” said the latter, “and, in a few days hence, I shall await your further instructions.”

“Be it your care that all be in order, my

father," replied the Gonfaloniere closing the door, as Ignatius traversed the gallery and descended the now totally dark staircase—for it was past midnight.

CHAPTER IV.

“ ———Give me some green laurel leaves
To float down memory's wave ;
One tone retain of my wild song,
To sanctify my grave ;
And then but little should I care,
How soon within that grave I were !

L. E. L.

It was rather more than three weeks after the Jesuit's conference with Martin Bernardini, before the required letter from Ferrai arrived, owing to that worthy's reluctance to relinquish his authority over Arianna, who had lately began to acquire a value in his eyes, from the influence that his supposed relationship to her gave him over Vittorio Cappello, through whose interest he had already acquired sundry commercial immunities, which greatly excited the envy of his compeers, while they increased his own satisfaction. Yet, as the power (to say nothing of the rights) of the Gonfaloniere, was

neither to be braved nor disputed, the crafty jeweller resolved to have recourse to his usual stronghold—fraud—in the management of the young Count Cappello; thinking, with a far greater man, though equal rascal (Cardinal Mazarin),—“*Time and I, against any other two personages.*” Accordingly he wrote the required letter confirming Martin Bernardini’s statement relative to the parentage of Arianna; but resolved at the same time to keep the whole matter a profound secret from the younger Cappello.

Armed with this document, it was at the close of a sultry evening in July, that Ignatius, mounted on a sleek and well caparisoned mule, which ambled nimbly to the chime of a collar of very musical silver bells, entered the then busy, and densely thronged streets of Ferrara. It was the Festa of San Giovanni, which for some reason best known to the wisdom of the Catholic church, had been transferred that year from June to July. From every window was suspended gorgeous pieces of tapestry, damask, or cloth of gold; according to the wealth or poverty of the inmates of the different houses. The streets were strewed ankle-deep with flowers and fragrant herbs, whose crushed and martyred leaves, sent up, as it were from

done nothing but assiduously pull his under lip; even forgetting to cross himself at the most indispensable parts of the ceremony. "Pardon, Signore," said Ignatius, in his blandest tone, "but you are kneeling on my robe, and I have not room to rise."

"Diavolo! you have never room!" was the stranger's uncourteous reply, nevertheless withdrawing as he spoke, with a corresponding gesture of impatience, his obtruding knee.

"I certainly have not room to suppose," retorted the Jesuit, "that I have ever seen you before, and therefore am the more astounded, Signor, at the reproachful discourtesy of your accusation."

"A thousand pardons, Padre," said the young man, rising hastily, and as he did so, discovering the handsome, but deeply-flushed face of Vittorio Cappello! "A thousand pardons, but I destined that remark for one many miles off—and missing its aim, it fell far short of the mark, and lighted upon you. Restore the misdirected word, and accept in its stead, my best apology."

"Consider the exchange as made, my son," said Ignatius, who knew Vittorio perfectly by sight, but who thought fit to keep that knowledge to himself, "if I may judge from ap-

perhaps, Padre, you would be the bearer of a letter for me, not to the Duke," added he, biting his nether lip, "but to a person about the court, in short it is to a misguided girl, who might be all the better for your spiritual counsel, father!—It is no less than a case of witchcraft, and I'll just tell you how the matter stands."

"Hush! my son," interrupted the Jesuit, pointing right and left to the thickly thronged streets, "this is no place for the discussion of matters of the like import; but if you will accompany me to the *locanda*, where I shall sup and sleep, the time and place will be all our own."

"You are right, Padre; and for the supper, I claim you as my guest."

"As you please about that, my son," said Ignatius with a smile, "as I dare say the supper will be none the worse for your ordering."

So saying, they pursued their way to the Albergo del Gran Duca, a large hostelry opposite the ducal palace. Vittorio's quickening his pace, as much as the pressure of the increasing throng would allow.

Arrived at the inn; Ignatius resigned his mule (which on its part was nothing loath), into the hands of the hostler, and then followed the landlord, who was bowing most obsequiously

to the young Count Cappello, who having already that day dined in the best room of the Gran Duca, was perfectly known to mine host through the "evil and good report" of his esquire and two pages, who now stood ready, one to take his hat, another his gloves, and the third his whip. No sooner, however, had Vittorio and the Jesuit reached the *Fenice*, which was the name and insignia of the great room of the Gran Duca; then these three, with the landlord were dismissed; the latter bearing an order for a good and speedy supper. When left to themselves, Ignatius walked to the table, which was always kept ready laid against each new arrival, and pouring out a beaker of wine pronounced it not bad, provided no better was to be had, while Vittorio, ungirding his rapier, and unfastening his vest, flung himself at full length upon a bench, and proceeded to give his companion a full and particular statement of all Arianna's alleged crimes and misdemeanours, in having worked upon his sister, through the medium of spells, incantations, and other damnable practices, so far to forget herself, as to espouse a low and base-born Florentine; but carefully suppressing even the most distant allusion to his own relative position with the accused. So that taken as a narrative, the details

which the young Count poured into the Jesuit's ear, might be considered as the triumph of Fiction over Fact.

"In short, *Padre mio*," added he, just as mine host entered with a *potage*, followed by Vittorio's two pages, bearing other dishes, "In short you see, *mio Padre*, what her unhappy father wants, is to bring her to reason, that is to get her to confess her crimes, in which case, I have promised to exert my influence with my family, to pursue the matter no further; yet, would you believe it, this silly and infernally obstinate girl persists in considering me as her worst enemy! You may withdraw till the rest of the supper is ready," concluded he, turning to the attendants, who had scarcely closed the door, when Ignatius, helping himself to soup, replied with a smile too faintly ironical to be perceived by one so pre-occupied as his companion.

"Alas! my son, I can easily believe, that this young damsel does look upon you as her worst enemy, for is not calumny and misconstruction the tax all virtue or all greatness pays in this world? Was not Cato denounced as a traitor! Scipio as a peculator of the public money! Socrates as a corrupter of public morals? And did not Euripides, well aware of

the pervading injustice of human nature, introduce a personage into one of his tragedies, who accuses Hercules of cowardice?"

"Very true," said Vittorio impatiently, for he was somewhat abashed, and almost inclined to laugh at the Jesuit's apparent belief in the sincerity of his good intentions towards Arianna. "Very true; but what I would have you do, father, is to set before her the real nature of the ordeal, the torments she will have to endure, the disgrace of the trial, the scorn of the people! Only rouse her out of the terrible apathy that she is now in; for she scarcely seems to me to be alive, except when she is crying, or listening to the rhapsodies of that half mad poet, young Tasso."

"Young! nay, Bernardo must be honest sixty, every hour of it."

"I mean not him; but his son, Torquato."

"I never heard of him; what, and is he a poet too?"

"Aye! some say a greater one than his father. He hath just written a poem called 'Gerusalemme liberata,' which is highly spoken of. At all events, he is under the protection of the Cardinal Ludovico D'Este; and he seems to have turned the brains of all the women about Alphonso's court; as, from Increzia and

Eleonora down to the goldsmith's daughter, they do nothing from morning till night but sit, and listen to him reciting his own verses. But let the Dukes of Ferrara and Urbino look to it; for if this is not *Pamor contrabando*, I dont know what is!"

"For that matter, my son, Dan Cupid is a *Guastafesta*, a disturber, who, as I dare say you know, laughs at all obstacles, braves all danger, and defies all laws. But as for this damsel, the goldsmith's daughter," continued Ignatius, "I will do my best to induce her to pursue that course which will insure her happiness and safety."

"Thanks, Padre," said young Cappello, hastily rising, and seating himself at another table, on which there were writing materials, "and in order that you may let me know what success you have had, I will leave you a memorandum of my whereabouts."

"Nay, my son; how know I but this damsel may be fair, as well as young? and *your* years are no guarantee against that species of natural witchcraft, contained in the beam of a bright eye, or the smile of a red lip, to say nothing of the incantation of a sweet voice. And it would be unseemly in one of my calling, to be perchance the aider and abettor in such spells

and witcheries, which I might be, did I carry on a correspondence with you touching this maiden."

"What then," exclaimed Vittorio, turning suddenly round, his eyes glaring like a tiger about to spring upon its prey, "you now refuse to convey to her the last warning I shall ever deign to send her?"

"Not so, my son—I merely refuse to enter into any correspondence with you touching the result of that warning, for the reasons I have just given you."

"Well! well! there is no need of repeating them—though you are very much mistaken if you think *I* affect this maiden," said Vittorio, with a short inward forced laugh, as he turned again to the table, and commenced his letter to Arianna, which was nothing more than a triad of the most impassioned, yet insulting, professions of love, followed by the most fearful threats, if she persisted in rejecting them.

"'Tis strange," thought the Jesuit, as he poured out a goblet of wine, and kept his eyes steadily fixed upon the handsome profile of young Cappello—"Tis strange how all these Cappellos seem to fall, as it were, one after another, into my power—Courage! courage! and vengeance will yet be mine."

The Jesuit continued to eat, or rather to make ineffectual attempts at eating, the dessert which had replaced the supper, and Vittorio continued to write, till it was time for them to separate for the night, when the latter delivered his packet into Ignatius' hand, begging that he would see that its three ponderous seals were broken by no other hands but those of the person to whom it was addressed. Having given the required promise, and exchanged sundry *Felici Notte's* with the young Count, the Jesuit began balancing the letter on his hand—

‘What if I should possess myself of the contents of this somewhat colossal *Biglietto d'Amore!*’ thought he, ‘why, what then? I should only have the trouble of reading a parcel of impossible promises, which I should find much better inflated in ‘*le belle Giornate,*’ or have the regret of finding Petrarcho’s most delicate sonnets gone mad in melancholy prose. O no! this breach of trust would avail me nothing, and I hate works of supererogation; on the contrary, my tampering with this letter might militate against the mission I am now upon; for if the girl is inclined to doubt her good fortune in being the Gonfaloniere’s niece, instead of that rascally goldsmith’s daughter, who would sell her far cheaper than any of the baubles in his shop, this letter will at all events

had lost, "would you allow me to look at that packet you were good enough to take charge of. Perhaps it may have got into that."

"Certainly," said the Jesuit, producing the packet, which Vittorio perceiving was perfectly intact, began shaking each side down on the table, and this being of no avail in bringing to light the missing letter, he was about to break the seals in search of it within, when he suddenly affected to recollect where he had left it, and having no plausible pretext for retaining the packet, he restored it to Ignatius, again wishing him good night, and merely adding, "We shall meet at breakfast, Padre?"

"That depends, my son, whether you are astir early; for I generally go out to meet the sun as soon as he is risen."

So saying they separated, and Ignatius took very good care that they should not meet again, being many miles, before the sun's first ray had gilded the east, on his way to Belriguardo. The heat in the middle of the day was so intense, that being obliged to lie by all the sultry forenoon, it was evening before the Jesuit reached his destination. Having changed his dress, and left his mule at the village inn, he walked up in the calm sunset hour of a beautiful evening, to the summer palace of Duke Alphonso; wishing to see the grounds of the

dungeons sharpen the memory, and how Spanish nobles repay obligations, or Philip the Second is not king of Spain, nor Ignatius Dragoni his right hand !’

With this reflection he reached the iron gates of the park, the bell of which having rang, a porter issued from a castellated lodge, thickly clothed with ivy, and admitted him to what appeared one of the scenes of the Decameron realised. Beneath different umbrageous trees sat groups of gaily dressed courtiers of both sexes, while under others, danced an equally brilliant assemblage, to the soft music of sackbuts, flutes, and lyres ; here and there, but neither “few” nor “far between” were buffets, glittering with gold plate and jewelled cups, and laden with wines, sherbets, fruits and flowers that looked like sylvan altars to Flora and Pomona, the priests of which were zealously personated by daintily attired pages, and magnificently dressed serving-men. The timid deer, lured by the music, had ventured in herds to look at the dancers, till some magnificent stag, catching a glimpse of his own dappled form in the glassy lake, gilt as it was with the sun’s declining rays, imagined it to be a rival from some neighbouring forest, and set off at full speed, followed by the whole train. Further on, where the fern ceased to wave, and

seemed with the sparkling waters, that for a moment he was almost tempted to believe in the fabled power of the beautiful form before whose effigy he was standing. The whole scene was one of enchantment—

“ He stood in a strange universe, which seemed
A something from the vanished past redeemed.”

Reluctantly, at length, he quitted his position near the fountain, and ascended the steps till he came to a large square basin or fish-pond, filled with innumerable gold and silver fish. The water-works in the centre of this basin, were a bronze and silver representation of the fable of Latona, and at the back of this sheet of water rose the last terrace, in the form of a beautiful pleasaunce, the vivid green of whose velvet sward looked as if it had never been pressed by anything heavier than fairy footsteps. At the end of this pleasaunce, to the left, stood the palace, a large low range of building, as unornamental in its exterior architecture as Italian villas generally are, but relieved by one of those Moorish galleries with a veranda running round the first story.

The Jesuit walked on till he approached the house, to which there was also a Moorish court of pillars and arches, and a large fountain of lions in the centre. As he drew near, a page

emerged from behind one of the pillars, where he had been playing with one of his companions, and inquired what might be the holy Padre's business ?

"I would speak, my son, on a matter of much moment, with the Signorina Arianna, one of the Duchessa D'Urbino's ladies."

"Your name, Padre, and I will inform her of your arrival, though I know her to be at this moment in attendance on the Duchess."

"My name, my son, would not advance the matter, inasmuch as that she is ignorant of it, I being a total stranger to her ; therefore merely have the goodness to deliver the message with which I have charged you, adding, that it is on the part of a monk of the order of Loyola."

The page, having scanned Ignatius from head to foot, bowed silently as he retired into the house in quest of Arianna. The page soon returning, bid Ignatius follow him, and leading him to the house, not to the door, but to one of the windows of a saloon looking out on another pleasure, which being open he desired him to enter.

"The Signorina made no objection to seeing me, then ?" interrogated the Jesuit, as he walked

towards the house at the other side of the court.

“It is not her way to make objections to anything,” rejoined the page, “but she turned deadly pale when I told her that a monk of the order of Loyola wished to speak with her.”

‘No doubt,’ thought Ignatius, ‘she thinks I am the bearer of an arrest for witchcraft from the holy office. So far so good, for she will be agreeably disappointed.’

The room into which the Jesuit now entered was not over large, but what it wanted in size, it amply made up for in luxury. The walls were of crimson velvet, laid on in compartments—that is, in richly gilt frames of cathedral spires and pillars, the carving and fretwork of which, while highly wrought and elaborate in the extreme, yet stood out in bold relief. In each of the four corners of the room were niches, lined with mirrors, and containing statues made serviceable for lamps; the different subjects of which were—Narcissus bending over a stream, the water being represented by a sheet of looking-glass at his feet, at the side of which were a tuft of marble, Narcissus flowers, which formed lamps—while, Psyche looking at Cupid, with the lamp—

Bacchus and Ariadne—and Hero watching for Leander, with a torch—constituted the other three. The floor of this apartment was of the purest white marble, the centre of which was inlaid with the arms of Ferrara in gold, encircled by a wreath of laurel. In the middle of the room stood what, in modern parlance, would be called a *jardinière*, on a table of lapis lazuli. The *jardinière* itself was a large basket of finely but massively wrought gold wire, studded with enamel flowers, while within it was a profusion of the rarest and most luxurious real ones. Above this basket, at the back of the table, rose a peacock, as large as life, with its tail spread, which, with its body, was composed entirely of precious stones. Through the medium of mechanism within, while a soft and melodious air was playing, the bird kept turning and bending down its head, as if in the act of listening. Beside the velvet settees round the room, the backs of which were elaborately carved and richly gilt, there were also broad low-backed velvet chairs with deep gold fringe round the seats. There were also several *prie-dieux*, not chairs, but real *prie-dieux*, of carved ivory and gold, upon whose velvet cushions were placed splendidly illuminated missals, cased in all the luxury of that

most costly gold filagree, so abundant in the sixteenth century. About the floor were innumerable soft velvet cushions, or footstools, beside other low kind of *tabourets* for seats. The ceiling, which was of a cupola form, was ornamented with a beautiful fresco of Aurora, drawn on by the hours, and met by the sun, the splendour of whose golden rays were so well imitated, that they appeared to illumine the whole room. The large high mantlepiece was supported on either side by pillars representing Egyptian palm trees, whose richly gilt foliage met in a sort of arch over the top. Being summer, the wide hearth was filled with flowers, in the centre of which played a small portable crystal fountain of perfumed water.

Near the mantlepiece, beside a table spread with a crimson velvet cover, fringed with gold, sat the beautiful Increzia D'Este, Duchessa D'Urbino. The fashion of her dress was precisely the same as that represented in the portraits of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, but the material consisted of thick white satin flowered with gold, the pointed bodice and tight sleeves of which were covered with a sort of net-work, composed of a flowing pattern of myrtle, done in emeralds and brilliants, while from her delicate and taper waist hung a *cordelier* of the

most costly jewels, one end of which she held in her left hand, while the right (the elbow of which rested on the table) pressed her temple. The beauty of her hands (which might have served for models, both as to form and colour) was somewhat impaired by the multiplicity of ponderous rings, which the fashion of the time rendered it indispensable to wear. Her bright chesnut hair was plainly parted on her high fair forehead, and brought low on either cheek, the dark and glossy braids, forming an harmonious contrast to her fair and brilliant but delicate complexion. On her head she wore a black velvet cap, of the Mary Stuart form, bordered with pearls. Upon the cushion on the floor, obtruded a small foot, cased in a high-heeled embroidered green velvet slipper, and a white taffeta stocking with gold clocks.

On a low *tabouret*, nearly at her feet, sat the younger Tasso, reading out his own poem of the "*Gerusalemme*," which, to judge from appearances, he seemed to know by heart, as the large lustrous eyes of the young poet were never for one moment removed from the beautiful face of his deeply-attentive auditor. His dress was gorgeous and studied, forming a striking contrast with the careless, nay, almost slovenly simplicity of his attire, the morning he

had accompanied Paolo Paruta to the Patriarch of Aquilea's levee at Venice.

In the recess of the deep window sat Arianna before an embroidery frame, but, like the Duchess, her attention seemed more given to the poet than to her own occupation. As the Jesuit placed his foot on the threshold of the window, the young Torquato was reading the following passage from his great poem, which lost none of its force from his declamation :—

“ Partimmo noi, che fuor dell'urna a sorte
 Tratte non fummo, ognun per se nascoso,
 Di amor, nol nego, le fallaci scorte
 Seguendo e d'un liel volto insidioso :
 Per vie ne trasse disusate e torte
 Fra noi discordi, e in se ciascun geloso ;
 Nutrian gli amori e i nostri Sdegni (ahi tardi
 Troppo il conosco !) or parolette or guardi.”

The monk's shadow now becoming perceptible within the room, Tasso ceased to read, and the Duchess half rose from her chair to return the stranger's courtly salutation.

“ I fear, gracious Ladies,” said he, joining his hands imploringly, and placing them on his breast under his chin, while his head was bent reverentially forward, “ I fear that I interrupt you ?—pray allow me to retire and await your leisure—for though the bearer of good tidings, few words,” added he, in his most flattering

tone, turning to Tasso, "can hope to inspire so much interest as those glowing ones which I had the good fortune, young Sir, to hear you repeat as I entered."

Tasso, though somewhat of a philosopher, was also a poet! What wonder, then, that he thought Ignatius a person of much taste and discrimination? and involuntary offered him a chair, while the Duchess (who had conceived the same opinion) pressed him to remain, assuring him that his presence was no interruption.

"You are too good, illustrious lady," replied Ignatius, "but my business is solely with the Signorina Arianna, who perhaps will accord me a few minutes' private converse?"

At this Arianna trembled violently, and turned exceedingly pale, from a conviction that the Jesuit was connected with some plot of Vittorio Cappello; so little idea had she of the real nature of his mission.—For fate generally diversifies her masquerade, and steals upon us with a noiseless step, at times and in places where we least expect the change!—As soon as she was sufficiently collected to speak, she replied,

"Good father, I have no secrets; there is nothing you can have to impart to, or about, me, that you may not disclose before this

illustrious lady and Signor Torquato, if they will graciously take the patience to hear it."

And so saying, Arianna resumed her seat, from which she had risen on the Jesuit's entrance, feeling that should he be, as she suspected, an emissary of Vittorio, it would be some slight protection against them that the Duchess should hear the extent of his designs.

Ignatius, on his side, thought it would be quite as well to have Increzia's arguments to back his own, in favour of the truth of the facts he was about to disclose; and therefore he made no objection to this arrangement.—With his usual skill, he so opened his mission, by dwelling upon Arianna's supposed relationship to the goldsmith, and the consequent authority he had hitherto exercised over her, as to make it a relief to her to cling to the truth of his verbal statement, before he produced the further proofs contained in the Gonfaloniere's letter,—her mother's marriage certificate, and her father's picture.

"Dear Arianna," said the Duchess, throwing her arms round the almost fainting girl, "though it will cost me your companionship, I wish you joy with all my heart; the more so perhaps that this proves me a true prophet; for I always told Bianca that I was sure you never could be that wretch Ferrai's daughter;

ever since the time he put a false ruby into Alphonso's crown, when he lost the original one, the day Priuli was elected Doge of Venice."

"Alas! cara Dama!" replied Arianna, afraid to indulge in the delightful reprieve of her not being Ferrai's daughter, "how know we but this good father may have been imposed upon by some cunning device of Count Vittorio Cappello's? Albeit the tidings appear to me too bright for reality."

"Allow me, Signorina," said Tasso, "to look at your father's picture, for my father has a likeness of the Signor Carlo Bernardini, by which I may judge of the authenticity of this."——"It is unquestionably like," added he, gazing attentively at the portrait, "and," he continued, returning it to her, "I should say that this alone is sufficient proof that the good father has not been deluded with false pretences, and ample warranty for your belief in all that he has stated."

"At all events," interposed Ignatius, now producing Cappello's letter, and relating all the details of his meeting with him at Ferrara, "here is what will convince you, daughter, that the Count Vittorio is perfectly ignorant of the newly discovered fact of your being Martin Bernardini's niece, and not Ferrai's daughter."

Arianna, with a crimson blush, and a trembling hand, took the packet, and breaking the seals, hastily ran her eye over the contents. A look of proud indignation at the unworthy threats the writer resorted to, to terrify her into a subjection to his will, succeeded to the softer feelings that had filled her heart on opening the letter; yet, such are the inscrutable and intricate anomalies of human nature, that while resolved more than ever, to spurn one who had left nothing undone to degrade her, still her predominant feeling was that of intense happiness, to think that *she was now his equal in birth!—that she had a right to love him, if she pleased!* The idea was almost an undefined one to herself,—for it was one of those mystical blendings of many feelings, which form the silver links that lengthen out those exquisite moments of joy, that otherwise would only flash like meteors through the heart!—to leave it darker than before. It was some instants before Arianna had sufficient resolution to rouse herself from the reverie of sweet and bitter thoughts, into which she had fallen, and from which she was first awakened by the Jesuit's observing—

“ Besides, daughter, another thing that must convince you of the authenticity of my statement, is the fact of Count Vittorio's having

been here only the day before yesterday ; which precludes the possibility of his having had time to go back to Venice, and get Ferrai to write that letter, which confirms the Gonfaloniere's revelation respecting your relationship to him."

" True !" said Arianna, and she burst into tears.

" Come, Signora Bernardini," exclaimed the Duchess, playfully, " thou art but a wayward damsel, thus to weep at thy good fortune."

" Alas ! dear lady, is it good fortune to leave what one loves, in order to meet what—to say the least of it—one does not *know* ?"

" The Signorina is right," said Tasso, with a sigh, " earth has no joy that *can* compensate for the misery of leaving what one loves."

Here a page entered, and announced to the Duchess that Duke Alphonso and the whole court were assembled in the ball-room, and that the Prince of Modena was waiting to open the ball with her."

" Padre !" said the beautiful Increzia rising, and giving her hand to Tasso. " I will now leave you with my young friend ; but hope that you will at least tarry at my brother's court a week ? for indeed I cannot make up my mind to part with her sooner. We flatter ourselves, father, there is wherewithal to inte-

rest you at Belriguardo, for that number of days."

"The Duchess D'Urbino's invitation is quite sufficient inducement," bowed the Jesuit, "but I fear me the Gonfaloniere's impatience to greet his niece will hardly brook so long a delay. However, as some few days are requisite for preparation before any fair lady (out of a poem, or a romance) could take so long a journey; those days shall I pass with infinite satisfaction at Belriguardo."

After Tasso and the Duchess had left the room, Arianna remained for about an hour conversing with Ignatius; and then retired to her own chamber to ponder over the great and sudden change that had taken place in her destiny! while the Jesuit, later in the evening, repaired to the banqueting hall and mingled with what was then one of the most brilliant, and luxurious courts in Europe.

CHAPTER V.

"I'll give thee sixpence, I'll see thee d—d first."—

CANNING'S KNIFE-GRINDER IN THE ANTI-JACOBIN.

"Say in pursuit of profit or delight,
Who risk the most, that take wrong means or right?
Of vice or virtue, whether blest or curst,
Which meets contempt, or which compassion first?
Count all th' advantage prosp'rous vice attains,
'Tis but what virtue flies from and disdains:
And grant the bad what happiness they would,
One they must want, which is—to pass for good."

POPE.

It has been truly observed by somebody, and here I take leave to repeat it, that "some connoisseurs, would give a hundred pounds for the painted head of a beggar, who would threaten the living mendicant with the stocks." And so it was with the Signora Sylvestro who had been melted into tears at a small picture of a child begging in the midst of a snow storm, which having purchased at a price considerably larger than she could afford, and consigned the prize to Ghirihizzo, had just reached her own door,

when she was importuned by the plaintive tones of a blind boy asking charity ?

“Where do you come from child?” said she, for her curiosity was of that universal nature which extended itself to all persons, and all things.

“From Pistoja, Signora.”

“And what brought you from Pistoja ?

“A charitable carter.”

“What makes you beg?”

“Hunger.”

“Where are your father and mother?”

“In heaven, I hope!” said the poor child with a sigh.

“Horrid little wretch to wish your father and mother dead!”

“I do not wish them dead, but being dead, I hope they are in heaven.”

“Well, go about your business, and dont spend your time idling about the streets, you little vagabond.”

“One small coin for the love of heaven, Signora.”

“*Va via*, be off you rogue,” cried the Signora Sylvestro pushing him aside as she walked resolutely into the house, “virtuous indignation” and “suppression of vice” visible in every movement.

“Ghirihizzo, what are you about?” added

she turning suddenly round on perceiving that the dwarf did not follow.

“Only doing what you ought to have done, giving this poor child something to buy bread with,” was the cool reply.

“Nonsense, Sirrah! I never give to street beggars.”

“Or any others for that matter,” muttered the dwarf.

“I think it so very wrong to encourage that sort of thing.”

“What sort of thing? stinginess, or poverty?”

“Dont be impertinent, Sir, or I wont,—”

“Take me to the place of assignation by Dante’s stone to-night on the Piazza, is that it?”

“Hush! hush! for heaven’s sake good Ghirihizzo, not a word for your life. But you seem tired, come to my *gabinetto* and I will give you a cup of rosolio, after your walk.”

In order to make this last remark of Ghirihizzo’s and the lady’s reply intelligible, the reader must know, that Francesco de Medici, tired of the unsubstantial sustenance of flowers, and *billets-doux*, had so ardently pressed for an interview (with Bianca as he thought) that the Signora Sylvestro with her usual philanthropic benevolence, had consented to a meeting at midnight, in the retired corner of the Piazza

near Dante's seat ; alleging as a reason, for not letting him into the house, the extreme jealousy of her sposo. Indeed she was fond of complaining of her husband's jealousy, (which to do him justice, poor man, he concealed so well that it was perfectly imperceptible to every body else) for a jealous husband implied a young and beautiful wife. She had resolved upon taking the dwarf with her to this meeting, first, because, by being so attended, she thought she should appear a greater lady in the eyes of the Duke ; and secondly, by an inverse ratio of reasoning, her intense vanity made her proud of what another woman would have blushed to own even to herself, namely, her dereliction from all that was sacred in truth, or pure in morals, therefore she determined that Ghirihizzo should be witness to her conquest.

The whole of this important day, there was a sort of suppressed triumph about her manner ; which as the cause was unknown to every one but herself, the effect she intended to produce on others was totally lost, especially on Bianca, who was far too pre-occupied and wretched to pay much attention to external things. All continued monotonously unchanged about her, except the one being who was all the world to her ; and there indeed the change, or rather

changes were appalling! for Bonaventuri had run the gauntlet of marital tortures from loving less, to not loving at all, from apologised for and clumsily excused absences, to total neglect, and from total neglect to the worst, and last stage of *husbandism*, namely, coarse and brutal upbraidings for—the sighs, and tears, of which his conduct was the cause, but which, for that very reason were unpardonable libels in his eyes. On the other hand poor Bianca suffered quite enough from the vulgarity and petty persecutions, of the Signora Sylvestro: and, wife-like, trying to humour even her husband's tyranny, she would often when sharply taunted by him with her lowness of spirits, lay it at his aunt's door. There is no extreme too great for a man to go into, nor subterfuge too mean for him to resort to, when he has a point to carry, at least with his wife, which will account for Bonaventuri's one morning walking into Bianca's room; and after condescendingly admiring her embroidery, seating himself beside her, throwing his arm round her waist, and imprinting a hurried kiss upon her cheek, as he said, "I've been thinking love that you are very uncomfortable here, and so I have taken a house in the Via Maggio." *

* This house still exists in the Via Maggio at Florence, and

So unusual was even this hollow show of kindness on the part of the husband, that the poor wife burst into tears.

“ Oh hang it,” cried he, rising hastily, “ if I want to see the waters play, I can go to the Boholi, where at all events the sun shines above ’em ; but of all nuisances defend me from domestic hydraulics ! ”

“ I am not crying,” said Bianca, drying her eyes, and endeavouring to smile, but it was so kind of you to think of getting me out of this ; only I fear a house in the Via Maggio will be very expensive—how are we to pay for it ? ”

“ Why I suppose that casket of sapphires and diamonds of yours will have to go t’wards it,” said Bonaventuri, confusedly, as he tossed over his wife’s embroidery patterns, as if busily seeking for some one in particular.

“ I thought you had lost those long ago, at play, to the Cavalier Monaco ? ” said Bianca, looking up inquiringly.

is curiously painted with black frescoes outside. Francesco de Medici gave it to Bonaventuri, that he might be near the Contessa Ricci, and Bianca near the Pitti, she lived in it for some time before Francesco gave her the Villa Stiozzi. Within the porch of this house in the Via Maggio is the following inscription :—

“ Bianca Cappello

“ Prima che fosse Moglie a Francesco de Medici abito questo Casa che ella si edificò, 1563.”

Now she did not build it, but she added to it.

“ You thought ! it’s long before you’d think of anything you ought ; there’s no pleasing you on any terms—I never saw such a woman.”

And so saying, not finding it either agreeable or expedient to explain *how* the house in the Via Maggio was to be paid for, he had recourse to the most common but effective of all *manœuvres* in conjugal generalship, that of flying into a passion, and leaving the room.

Two days after this scene the news arrived of Baptista Bonaventuri’s death having taken place in the dungeons of the Inquisition at Venice ; and although having died intestate, his great wealth was confiscated by the Venetian government. Yet Pietro did not scruple to tell his wife that he had come into possession of a large portion of his uncle’s property, which satisfactorily accounted, not only for the house in the Via Maggio, but for a great many other luxuries attending it. Occupied in preparations for removing to this house, Bianca paid little attention to either the Signora Sylvestro’s additional importance or impertinence, though Ghirihizzo was eternally ridiculing the former, and repaying the latter with interest. At length the happy moment arrived when that amiable lady was to achieve what she considered her crowning triumph. She had left her

the Signora Sylvestro passed the threshold, and crossed the Piazza. Although a summer night, the air blew coldly, as it always does around that ponderous pile, as if the dead beneath sent up chill greetings to the living as they passed. There was no moon either, and the stars, ashamed no doubt to be witnesses of the folly of an old woman, twinkled dimly and sleepily behind clouds, that overspread the heavens. In silence the lady and her unwilling companion traversed the square till they reached the other side of the cathedral, opposite Dante's Stone—the place of *rendezvous*. But lo! not a living creature was to be seen.

“Surely,” said the Signora Sylvestro, with much trepidation, “he cannot have mistaken the hour?”

“I should not wonder,” replied the dwarf, between the parenthesis of a long yawn, in as *unconsolatory* a tone as he could possibly assume, “I should not wonder, for, judging by *you*, he seems to have no earthly idea of the progress of time.”

“Why judging by me?” asked the Signora, through whose adamantine cuirass of vanity no sarcasm could penetrate, “for I’m sure I have every reason to think him punctuality itself; for when expecting a letter or message, he has

always been under the window to a moment. But hush ! did you not hear"—

"To be sure I did—and see too," interrupted Ghirihizzo, just as Francesco de Medici, muffled in a large cloak of dark-coloured velvet, emerged from a projecting corner of the building, behind which he had hitherto been concealed, "to be sure I did, and see too, or else I could not have believed that our gallant, if not gay, Grand Duke, would have made such a dead set at an old woman, as to appoint a meeting among the tombs, at this time o' night."

"Would thou wert in one of the tombs, malapert, for thine insolence !" muttered the lady, as she advanced to meet her illustrious *Inamorato*.

"Most charming of women !" cried he, seizing her hand and pressing it to his lips, "this is too good, too kind of you—thus to brave the night air to crown my bold request ; but make me still more happy, by letting me hear from those sweet lips (round which for months my enamoured thoughts have hovered like bees) when and where we may meet in a more convenient place. For it is not here that the heart you have so completely enslaved, can prove to you its devotion. Nay, rose among roses," continued the Duke, forcibly retaining the Signora's hand,

which she had only attempted to withdraw in order to untie her mask, "you can have no hesitation in bestowing, on one who so truly adores you, those smiles which your senseless and faithless husband neglects for another far less attractive—a tyrant, in fact, that"—

"*My* husband a tyrant! *my* husband unfaithful!" exclaimed the astonished Signora Sylvestro, "no—no, Monsignore, although he is a husband, he is neither the one nor the other. Tyrant, indeed! I should just like to see him attempt it; and as for infidelity—why, poor man, he is more orthodox than the Pope."

"Do you not then call it tyranny, to exclude from the world so bright a gem as yourself?—and is it not faithless to sigh away his life at the feet of the Contessa Ricci?"

"Why, as for excluding me from the world, which he calls the devil's drawing-room, to be sure he has done his best; but he has never been able to succeed. But, ha! ha! ha! as for his sighs, poor man, they are never bestowed on any but his own gouty feet!"

"Really!—strange infatuation this of conjugal blindness!" murmured the Duke, and then added aloud, "but it is not of him, but of you I would speak, carina, there is no need of your stooping thus to conceal your height,"

continued he, scanning the muffled outline of the Signora's short, dumpy figure, "for there is no one here to detect you, and add not to the darkness of the starless heavens, by longer concealing from me the light of that most lovely face."

This notion of her stooping to conceal her height, when, on the contrary, she was making herself as tall as she could, mystified the Signora exceedingly, but her idiotic vanity was not to be disturbed, and therefore, after a little more simpering and *minauderie*, she removed her mask. As she did so, the dwarf raising the lantern to her face, exclaimed,

"I have heard of one prudent old woman, who, wishing to extend her friendships, lighted a candle to the devil—but I think I must be the devil himself returning the compliment, since I am holding a candle to an old woman."

"Diavolo! What in the name of all the devils have we here?" cried the Duke, as the light fell upon the red, wrinkled, simpering face of the Signora Sylvestro. "It is too bad of the Signora Bianca, after for so long a time receiving and answering my letters, to put upon me so cruel a trick. Vanish, old hag! and beware how, in your zeal for doing your

mistress' bidding, you again tamper with Francesco de Medici !”

And so saying he strode hastily away, while the undaunted Ghirihizzo cried after him,

“ I hope that you will not catch a cold by going away without a CAPPELLO (*hat*) !”

And the Signora Sylvestro remained wringing her hands, and repeating—“ Old hag, indeed ! old hag ! and mistress, indeed !—I’ll make him know that I am neither an old hag, nor the servant of Madame Bianca ! why the man must be blind !”

“ So I had always thought till to-night,” said the dwarf, coolly picking up the mask which the Signora in her passion had flung down at some distance from her. “ But,” continued he, “ it would seem that I have brought that to light, which hath brought him to his senses. This mask will go to heaven, at all events.”

“ What means the knave ?” inquired the angry dame, as she retraced her now languid steps across the Piazza.

“ Why,” replied the dwarf, with mock solemnity, “ Zoroaster relates, that he was once showed a vision of the infernal regions, wherein he saw enter several kings, amongst whom one

was minus his right foot. His curiosity being excited, he inquired the reason of it, and was answered, that that was a wicked monarch, who had never done but one good action, which was—being out hunting one day, he saw a poor camel tethered so far from any pasture, that it ran a good chance of dying of starvation, whereupon, taking compassion on the poor animal, he kicked with his right foot the picket that chained him, and set him free ; for which good deed this foot was placed in heaven, while the rest of the king met with its deserts below. Now this mask, for having performed the one good deed, of even for a short time concealing your face, will, I take it, have a good chance of making the acquaintance of the king's foot in the upper regions."

"Insolent !" muttered the Signora Sylvestro, as she re-entered her brother's house, with very different feelings from those with which she had quitted it half an hour before. Indeed, for several days after, she seemed subdued into an altered being, and she might have sunk under the death-blow her vanity had received, had she not still derived some consolation from the stucco compliments of an itinerant German artist of the name of Schnits, who took her portrait, and his wife her cast off clothes,

in return for the flummery they administered, for there is no sphere of life so low, but what there may be found those still lower, poorer, and meaner, to act as toadies for value received. It would have required the pencil of the unborn Hogarth, to have done justice to the giggling, girlish simpers of the Signora Sylvestro, as she was be-painted over by that dauber Herr Schnits, whose light rampant hair appeared to be actually galvanised into perpendicularity by the sheer intenseness of his own pomposity. Besides being a bad painter, he was also a torturer of insects—alias, an entomologist. Entomology, according to him, being the highest branch of philosophy! and no doubt it was edifying in the extreme, to those whose minds were sufficiently flea or gnat-bitten to comprehend it, to hear him expatiate with a sort of reverential awe upon the pathology of a flea or an ant, while the Signora Sylvestro and his wife indulged in the Ophelia-like occupation of gathering wild flowers, which, independent of the sweet, innocent, infantine frame of mind it evinced, also formed a cheaper decoration for their respective drawing-rooms, than the sophisticated cultivations of the garden.

CHAPTER VI.

**" Her hair was chesnut brown, and soft of hue,
As the sweet gloom that falls with even's dew,
That on her fine white forehead did divide
In the triumphant negligence of pride.
Her eyes were dark, but they were lights to shine,
That love adores, and poets call divine ;
And her cheeks (summer blooms) wore hues the while
Of love's soft innocence without its guile;
And on the poutings of her amorous lip
Where love delicious nectar long'd to sip,—
Beauty sat thron'd in that bewitching spell,
To which love kneels, and language cannot tell ;
Where charms triumphant made each gazer pay
Heart aches for looking, ere he turned away."**

JOHN CLARE.

" Love is an insidious, and not especially honorable enemy."

W. H. HARRISON.

ONE of the greatest characters of the present day, has observed in one of his flimsy fictions, that "The pure and the proud mind can never confide its wrongs to another, but only its triumphs and its happiness." Now it is precisely the reverse. The pure and the proud mind is always for disburdening itself of the poison of

its wrongs, and seeking sympathy, as the drooping flower cravingly turns its fading leaves to catch the pitying dew of heaven; while its happiness and its triumphs it quietly hives within the sunshine of its own breast.

Bianca had no triumphs—no happiness; but she had much sorrow:—and although every day she discovered that Donna Maraquita della Torre was less congenial to her, yet still it was a relief to her over-wrought spirit, to converse with her; for little did she dream of the serpent, into whose ear she was pouring the overflowings of her heart.

One morning, about a month after her removal to the Via Maggio, she desired Ghiribizzo to accompany her to the Via del Cocomero: as they were crossing the Ponte Santa Trinità, there stood a knot of persons talking together, which, upon approaching, proved to be the Marchese Ginori, Maggiordomo Maggiore to the Grand Duke; Signor Millantatore; and his step-son Gonzo Damerino; who finding Venice too dull for such dapper wits as themselves, had determined to try Florence as a wider sphere.

Now although Bianca passed so close to the Signor Millantatore, as to discompose the folds of his cloak, and cause him to stare her

full in the face, yet such was the brevity of his memory, and the obliquity of his vision, that he did not testify the slightest symptom of recognition; while the very slight inclination of his head, which Gonzo vouchsafed her, was more an involuntary act, than one of courtesy.

“I know not why it is,” said Bianca to her companion, when they had got a sufficient distance from this group, as she dashed a tear from her eye, “that I should be silly enough to feel annoyed at being slighted by two persons, whom I verily believe I despised more than any other two in all Venice.”

“That is the very reason,” replied the dwarf, “it is there being such reptiles, that angers you at their presumption! As for that minion, Gonzo, it being the mode just now for great people to forget you, he of course, as usual, makes a point of squaring his proceedings on their model.”

Bianca, like most persons who have revelled too largely in the poetry of imagination, coloured with the rich, but deceptive Claude tints of youth and hope, could ill brook the cold, dreary, and above all, sudden plunge into the realities, or prose of life, with its steep and rugged descents, sharp angles, barren vistas, and ever-warring strife of jarring elements. Solitude is

either an alchymist or a spider ; for if it cannot teach that philosophy which transmutes the chaotic atoms of our minds to the gold of resignation, and self-knowledge, it is sure to weave a dark and subtle web around our hearts ; and extract poison from all our three stages of existence—the past, the present, and the future ! —making us yield to bitter, but impotent sorrow, for the first ; neglect, the second ; and dread, the third. To women, therefore, it generally plays the spider ; which prefers deserted and neglected places, wherein to weave its treacherous meshes. And what is there in this world so dark and so desolate as the heart of a forsaken woman ? when the false hopes, and still falser vows, that once peopled it so brightly, have for ever departed !

The hours of unbroken loneliness Bianca was condemned to pass in her new abode, were beginning to manifest their influence in her total incapacity to baffle them by any sort of occupation. As weakness is the worst part of corporeal illness, and far more wearisome, and undermining than the acute pain which has preceded it, so the lassitude and inertness of spirit that succeeds intense mental agony, (and which the sufferers themselves so often mistake for the calmness of resignation) is, in fact, the

poisonous germ that renders the malady chronic, and defies the healing powers of either time or change. Month after month had Bianca written in vain to her father and brother; the stern contempt of silence was the only result of her applications. She had also written to the Patriarch of Aquilea; and the old man, both from his natural urbanity, and lingering affection for her, did reply;—but it was only to tell her that *there* must end their correspondence; for, that she had been denounced by the Council of Ten, and her name erased from the roll of San Marco. Still, notwithstanding all this, she had another and a dearer hope than any of those she had lost, it was that of becoming a mother. But, here again a fresh and more cruel disappointment awaited her; for the little girl to whom she gave birth, only survived six weeks. Then, indeed, she *was* desolate!—the last ray of sunshine to which she had turned, had set in eternal night;—the last straw she had clung to had eluded her grasp! Death is not for the wretched, or else were they not wretched; but a long pool of stagnant life is generally the goal of their misery—the *Avernus*, where they lose all but memory! which ever becomes immortal at the extinction of hope, and is ‘the dread hereafter of the mind.’

Her husband she seldom saw ; as he passed little time at home, beyond that requisite to make a more splendid toilette, in order to shine abroad ; and, although he was all the fashion, no one troubled themselves to notice, or even to note the existence of his neglected wife. ‘ If she had made a fool of herself, and lost caste by making a bad marriage, it was not their fault ; and she must take the consequences.’—So argued the world ; disinterestedness and poverty (especially the latter) being the only two crimes *it* has no toleration or excuse for. The echoes of that world came discordantly on her solitude ; its unjust or unfavourable opinions of herself, were sure to reach her through the medium of the only good-natured friend she possessed—the Signora della Torre ; while pertness was repeated to her as wit, and absence of deformity extolled and pointed out as beauty ; and a broad hint of the superiority of these persons to herself. But Bianca was too ready to discover, and acknowledge merit in others, to suffer in any degree from the venom such remarks were intended to convey. While Maraquita della Torre, as a discarded mistress of Francesco de Medici, though quite ready to become vilely subservient to the Duke’s profligacy, (not being one of

those silly persons whose affections or consciences stand in the way of their interest), nevertheless resolved to put an enormous tariff, in the shape of petty torments, on the peace of mind of any of her rivals, that should come within her reach; and as Francesco's feeling for Bianca, (whether from the difficulties and opposition it had hitherto met with, or any other cause), seemed to have in it more of the depth and refinement of a passion, than the butterfly fancies that had hitherto sent him from the feet of one beauty to another; it is certain that Donna Maraquita was not likely to spare her.

On arriving in the Via del Cocomero, instead of being shown into any of the reception rooms, Bianca was requested to wait in the Signora della Torre's bedchamber, till that lady, who was at the time engaged, could see her. Leaving Ghirihizzo in the hall engaged in an interesting *tête-à-tête* with a very loquacious parrot, she ascended the wide staircase, where she was met on the first landing by Donna Maraquita's tire-woman, who bowed and smiled her into her mistress' room, placing a large rose-coloured silk-screen, flowered with silver, before the sunny window, and an arm chair, footstool, and some books for Bianca, whom she then

left, after inquiring if she would take any refreshment?

Ninetta (the abigail) had no sooner closed the door, than Bianca's attention was attracted to a multiplicity of splendid tissue and brocade dresses, that cumbered the embroidered white satin coverlet of the gorgeous Medici bed that stood at one corner of the room; which with its rich crimson velvet hangings, lined with white satin, magnificently carved, and gilt tester, and gracefully waving coronals of snow-white plumes, had more the appearance of a throne than a bedstead. On the toilette (which with the frame of the looking-glass was composed of richly embossed gold, inlaid with precious stones) appeared within an open casket a magnificent *parure* of brilliants, while down one side of the casket hung, as if hastily opened and as hastily left, a long string of large sized Oriental pearls intersected with strung rubies of equal magnitude. Bianca turned with an involuntary sigh from these things that she *used* to wear, to look at the pictures that graced the walls. The first her eye fell upon was a portrait of Boccaccio's Fiammetta, which hung near a door.

"Pretty Fiammetta!" said she apostrophising the picture, "you were indeed, happy, for

you were much loved, and you never knew the wormwood of outliving the love you had inspired." Her eyes filled with tears, and she turned away from the inanimate canvas, with a slight though vague feeling of envy, at the expression of happiness it portrayed. As she did so, the loud sound of angry voices in the adjoining room caught her ear; that of the first speaker she was unacquainted with, but the words which reached her in perfect distinctness were these.

"Remember *Madama*, I will not be trifled with much longer. So look to it!"

To which Donna Maraquita's well-known voice replied,

"Is it my fault that I cannot do impossibilities? I am not a witch to work miracles with love filtres, and bring the silly thing from the depths of her infatuation for one who cares not for her, to the proud triumph *your well-known constancy* would bestow upon her."

"Sarcasm, madam, is no part of your office, and,"—

But here Bianca moved away, to avoid hearing what was evidently not intended for her to hear. She had scarcely been seated in a chair with a book she had taken up, when she heard a door open in the next room, and no further

sound of voices reached her ear beyond the "Zitto! zitto! hush! hush!" of Donna Maraquita, and "*Lasciatemi fare*; leave it to me." To which a profound silence ensued, and at the expiration of five minutes, the door of the chamber in which she was sitting, opened, and Signora della Torre entered, and imprinted a Judas kiss on the fair forehead of her guest, accompanied with a thousand apologies for having been so long in coming to her. "But the fact is, *carina*," added she, "there is a festa to-night at Gino Capponi's, and those tiresome hairdressers and dressmakers tease one all day long, positively I shall not have a *guard 'infante** to wear if Brancadore does not bring me home the one I ordered, which she assured me was the exact copy of one, that Catherine de Medici had given to her daughter-in-law, the young Queen of Scots, and which rivalled at Paris as a topic of general conversation the massacre of the Calvinists at Vassy, and the Constable de Montmorenci's dying answer to the priest who shrived him at *St. Denis*."

"What was it?" inquired Bianca.

"Why, is it possible, child, that you do not know? when nothing else has been talked of, for at least ten days!"

* A fardingale.

“ You forget that I go nowhere, and see no one !”

“ Ah true ! well then it was one of those fine sentences, which are the making of historians, since it fills a gap, and rounds a period without taxing their ingenuity, or drawing upon their imagination. Let me see, Oh ! yes it was this—really I have heard it so often that I had almost forgotten it : a priest was exhorting the poor Constable, who fell covered with wounds among Catherine de Medici’s six thousand vanquished Swiss, to which he replied, ‘ *Pensez vous qu’ après avoir vécu tant d’années avec honneur, je ne sache pas mourir un quart d’heure ?* ’ ”

“ Happy Constable ! ” exclaimed Bianca, “ the forfeiture of his eighty years of life was not too much to achieve such a quarter of an hour, which if his last, was at the same time his most glorious victory ! ”

“ Well, child, dont stand there with that excited Joan of Arc look as though you were about to invoke the Huguenot Constable out of his grave. But vouchsafe to bestow upon me a little feminine pity for the non-arrival of my dress.”

“ Nay, it is yet early, besides,” added Bianca with a smile, pointing to the bed “ with such a *corps de reserve*, you cannot be in very great distress.”

"Dost not know, lady bright, that a well known dress fares as badly in the world as a well known face, where they are sure to have it good naturedly remarked that it is high time they should not be seen so often! But now I think of it. I never saw you in full dress; nothing but these eternal brown silks, or sober satins, only fit for a citizeness of the most irreproachable dullness."

"Then the fitter for me!" interrupted Bianca, "for that is all I aspire to be."

"Be what you like, provided to please me you only *seem* a *Gran Dama* once more for five minutes, and put on yon blue velvet flowered with silver that I may judge for myself, whether the reports that used to float from Venice half over the world of your queen-like beauty, were, or were not exaggerated."

"That beauty must be small indeed," said Bianca with a faint laugh, "that can be heightened or lessened by the fashion of a robe, or the sparkle of a jewel, so I am afraid you would be disappointed."

"Not so, begging your Loveliness' pardon," replied Donna Maraquita stealing a glance at her own faultless face in the glass. "Not so, for I am no believer in the superior charm of unornamented flesh and blood, and the proof

that I am right is, that even Venus herself had no sooner risen from her first marine bath than she forthwith got the Graces to adorn her. So now for a repetition of that scene," added she, proceeding to place some diamonds in Bianca's hair, and begging of her to take off her morning dress.

"Not to-day! Oh! not to-day!" said Bianca, burying her face in her hands, and bursting into tears.

"*Poverina!* has anything fresh happened," asked her companion with affected sympathy.

"No, nothing, only"—

"Only what?"

"I have not seen Pietro now for three whole days, and I feel so very, *very* miserable."

"Tush, always Pietro, that eternal Peter, for my part, I wish he was with Peter the Hermit, and then perhaps you might act like a rational being and listen to those worth a thousand Pietros, and who would give both their eyes for a glance from one of yours. But there is nothing extraordinary, child, in your not having seen him for three days, the extraordinary thing would have been if you had, for he is at Vallambrosa with the Ricci's, Ferroni's and Strozzi's."

"At Vallombrosa!" echoed Bianca with a

sigh as she recollected how on the first day she entered Florence, Bonaventuri had said that he *must* take her *there* when summer came. Summer *had* come, and gone, and returned again ! yet she had never been to Vallombrosa ; but the *Contessa Ricci had*. Then Filippo Vasi's festa to the Archduchess Joan at Venice rushed into her mind, and her rival stood before her as vividly as she had done then ; in all the prestige of her youthful beauty, and bridal paraphernalia. " No wonder," added Bianca, speaking her thoughts aloud, " that I wished to be like her !"

" Like who, carina ?"

" The Contessa Ricci, I saw her before I married at an aquatic fête given by the Admiral of the fleet at Venice to your future Grand Duchess."

" The likeness may still exist," said Donna Maraquita spitefully, " for you have only changed places. Bonaventuri was *your* devoted slave *then*, he is *hers now*—and that is all !"

" It is indeed *all* !" groaned Bianca, " and more one cannot lose."

" Certainly not, but we are losing time, which once lost it is impossible ever to find," said Signora della Torre, as she proceeded to un-

fasten the now passive Bianca's dress which she replaced with the before mentioned blue velvet flowered with silver, her victim standing up, sitting down, or turning round mechanically just as she desired her to do, without appearing to be the least aware of her own, or her companion's movements.

"Well, really I must confess that you *do* look beautiful!" exclaimed Donna Maraquita, "Wait there five minutes till I bring Ninetta to look at you."

Bianca nodded assent she knew not to what, for her thoughts were far away; and Signora della Torre left the room, leaving her guest with her eyes fixed upon the ground, and her arms folded on her bosom. At the expiration of a few minutes, the velvet curtain suspended before the door near which hung the picture of Fiammetta was slightly agitated—the door behind it opened and closed, and some one entered. Bianca, thinking it was the Signora della Torre, said, without turning round, or raising her eyes—

"Ah! Maraquita, you think me silly, but if you knew what it was to love ——"

"*If* I knew what it was to love!" said a deep tremulous voice; and Bianca felt her ancles clasped, and, on raising her eyes, beheld, as a

scream escaped her, Francesco de Medici* kneeling beside her.

“*If* I knew what it was to love!” repeated Francesco. “Ah! charming Bianca, what else have I known since the day I beheld you.”

“My Lord,” said Bianca, struggling to free herself from the Duke’s grasp, and rising as she did so, “it befits not your Highness to kneel, nor me to command—but I do implore that you will rise and leave me.”

“Nay, but it befits a slave to sue, and even a tyrant *sometimes* to have mercy; give me back *my* heart, or give me *yours*—surely the barter is a fair one.”

“Hardly, my Lord,” replied the beautiful Venetian, as an involuntary archness played round each dimple of her mouth, “hardly, since report accuses your Highness of mislaying your heart so often, that it is scarcely fair to tax me with the theft.”

“True,” said Francesco, adopting the same tone, “I do remember me, it was a free gift; therefore, I withdraw the charge of theft, but

* It was as I have here described it, that the Grand Duke obtained his first interview with Bianca Cappello, whose beauty was heightened for the occasion by the manoeuvre of a change of dress, achieved by her treacherous friend.

have you *no* gratitude, to give nothing in return? Royal hearts, I would have you to know, *bellissima*, are like kingly thrones, not to be won every day."

"And, I would have *you* to know," retorted Bianca, warding off the Duke's arm, which was trying to encircle her waist, "that royal hearts are in another respect like thrones—once abdicated, their power is at an end."

"Ha! a very doctor fit to wrangle with the schools, save, that instead of teaching reason, methinks you would make even the grave professors lose theirs; but since I am fairly caught in my own springe, and that being in possession of my abdicated heart, you reject my faith, and deny me all hope, nothing remains for me but your charity—surely *that* you will not withhold?"

"Unwary persons, my Lord, often bestow charity to be rid of importunity; but, when not given from the heart, I have always found this a bad plan, as those who are thus dismissed generally return."

"Well, then," said the Duke, in a tone of gravity far more natural to him than that of banter, which he had hitherto assumed, "will you give me nothing?—not even one kind word from your heart?"

“Alas ! my heart is not my own ; therefore, my Lord, you ask impossibilities.”

“Then only tell me who is my happy rival, that I may know who in all the world most to envy.”

“Need you ask, when you know my husband.”

“Your husband, pshaw ! I generally prefer husbands to all other rivals, first, from the unattractive nature of their avocation, but principally from the inevitable destiny that awaits most of them—at least in Italy. But rely upon it, sweet Bianca, *yours* is more than any other unworthy of such constancy.”

“Your Highness is right,” said Bianca, with a deep sigh, “he, as well as all others, are unworthy of such a vow—constancy belongs to heaven !”

“I have no doubt, most lovely lady, that angels might learn pity, and sages wisdom, from your lips—but all *I* seek from them are kisses,” cried the Duke, attempting to throw his arms round her—but she rushed forward and reached the door—it was locked on the outer side ! Frantic with fear and disappointment, Bianca flung herself on her knees before Francesco, scarcely able to speak. She grasped the corner of his richly embroidered violet velvet cloak, as

she gasped, in broken accents, looking up beseechingly in his face—

“My Lord, I will not speak of *my* honour, since you seem to disregard it, but I *appeal to yours.*”

“And you shall not appeal in vain,” said Francesco de Medici, raising her. For, though a profligate whom vice did not appal, he was still a gentleman, and disdained the vulgar conquest of force; besides, without for a moment relinquishing his purpose, the first great point of an interview had been gained, and a few minutes conversation; he therefore thought his best chance of ultimate success was in proceeding *pianissimo* — add to which, sated with his hitherto easy victories, there was an excitement in the obstacles that now beset him, which he was by no means averse to prolonging—they were new to him, and novelty was what he had long sought, but sought in vain.

“If,” said he, in a well assumed tone of contrition, taking Bianca’s hand, “you can for once forgive this folly, this madness—call it what you will—of which I have been guilty, but of which your fatal beauty was the cause, you shall for the future find a friend, where you have hitherto known only an aggressor.”

Bianca, too happy in her escape to be critical as to the Duke's words, replied—

“Your Highness asked me a few minutes since, if I had no gratitude. As the best answer to that question, I now beg of you to accept it,” and she placed the hand he had an instant before relinquished, again in his, which he raised respectfully to his lips.

“Let me at least,” said he, “conduct you from this house, and, in doing so, warn you never again to enter it.”

There was so much apparent honesty in this advice, that it considerably enhanced the Duke (as he foresaw it would) in her estimation.

“Your warning, my Lord,” she replied, “is superfluous, but I thank you very sincerely for it, nevertheless.”

The Duke then retired while she changed her dress, which she was not long in doing, as she almost tore off the splendid one of her perfidious friend.

Not a word passed between them, as Francesco escorted her through the saloon by which he himself had entered; and it was well for the mistress of the mansion that she did not cross their path, for had it depended on Bianca, and

a look could have killed her, her sands of life would have been numbered. On reaching the court, the Duke deferentially raised his hat, and he bowed slowly, as Bianca crossed the threshold.

CHAPTER VII.

" Hast thou ever weigh'd a sigh ?
Or studied the philosophy of tears ?
Hast thou descended deep into the heart
And seen their source ? If not, descend with me."
YOUNG'S NIGHT THOUGHTS.

" Adieu ! oh, wild and worthless all,
The heart that wakes this last farewell—
Why for a thing like thee should fall,
My harpings like a passing bell ?
Why should my soul and song be sad ?
Away ! I fling thee from my heart,
Back to the selfish and the bad,
With whom thou hast thy fitter part !
Adieu !"
J. K. HARVEY.

GREAT griefs and dire events hover round the heart for some time before they plunge into its depths—yet, strange to say, these fore-shadowings seldom lessen the shock of their advent—though these it is, that we are wont to call *presentiments*.

Three months had elapsed, since the scene which had taken place between the Duke and

Bianca at Donna Maraquita's. The latter had made many overtures, but in vain, to her quondam friend, endeavouring, with much sophistry and plausibility, to attribute that occurrence entirely to accident. Francesco, it is true, had found his way to the Via Maggio, but his visits were so rare, and of so deferential—nay, almost ceremonious a nature, when they did occur, that they lulled every suspicion to sleep in the mind of Bianca, especially as his marriage with the Archduchess Joan of Austria was now about to take place in a few weeks.

One circumstance, indeed, might have opened Bianca's eyes to this deceitful calm, had she not been too pre-occupied with her ever-present regrets at her husband's desertion ; which was, that she never expressed a wish, from the smallest to the greatest, that she did not find it realised at the end of four-and-twenty hours by the Duke, in the most delicate and unobjectionable manner. So that, as she looked around on the daily increasing beauty and luxury of her house, she taxed Ghirihizzo with betraying all her inadvertently expressed wants, and the Duke with an over generosity in supplying them ; but he pleaded the privileges of *friendship* ! and she was yet too young to be aware of one great physiological truth, which

is, that no man is sufficiently pure and disinterested to study and anticipate a woman's wishes, without the *hope* (however vague and unfounded) of gratifying his own ; but as Francesco never talked of love, so she never thought of it, or indeed of him, except when forced by his eternal *petits soins* to think him the most amiable and generous of human beings ; about the most dangerous state of opinion, by the bye, that a woman can arrive at with regard to to a *ci-devant* lover, and *soi-disant* friend.

Bonaventuri's *liaison* with the Contessa Ricci was now a public topic of conversation, though so common an event as conjugal infidelity at Florence would have hardly given scope for a passing remark, but for the uncommon one which attended it, of the Conte Ricci being desperately fond of his wife, and proportionably jealous—and therefore the speculations of how the matter was likely to terminate, when his suspicions were once roused, gave to it a zest for public criticism that the *fadeurs* of mere ordinary affairs of gallantry wanted ; but it was long ere this public curiosity was destined to be gratified ; for vice then, as it ever has done, and it is to be feared ever will do as long as society is constituted as it is, strutted triumphantly in the sunshine of prosperity,

while virtue seldom knows any other fate than to wither out its neglected existence in the shade.

Bianca was sitting listlessly one evening, feeling if possible more depressed than usual, in a back room, at an open window, the balcony of which overlooked the Fondaccio Santo Spirito ; the bells of that church had just tolled out their last solemn call to vespers, and the sweet but somewhat languid perfume of the flowers that filled the balcony stole over the room, and seemed to reproach her gently for having forgotten to give them water.

“ Poor things !” said she, rising and ringing a small silver hand-bell for Ghirihizzo to bring some water. “ Poor things ! even your little lives are doomed to know the sorrow of neglect, and through me, who of all people should know its bitterness too well to inflict it.” The first plant she watered was a tuft of *Rosalini* (or small roses, called in France *roses du roi*), because they were Bonaventuri’s favourite flower ; but she knew not, that they were so merely from being those of the Contessa Ricci, of whose daily *bouquet*, as composed by Pietro, they formed the chief ornament. “ I wonder,” said Bianca, on finishing her task, and the tears came into her eyes at the doubt,

“whether he will gather any of these to-day, or whether he will come here at all?—for the day is nearly ended now. Poor Tafano,” added she, returning the little creature’s affectionate caress, “at all events you will never desert me, with your big, beautiful, loving, honest eyes?”

The little thing sniffed, and rolled its innocent head, as if answering its mistress’ question in the affirmative—till, suddenly pricking up its long silken ears, it looked towards the door, and gave one or two barks; in another moment Bonaventuri entered the room, and the little animal shrunk in more closely on the edge of its mistress’ dress where it was sitting, for dogs know intuitively the people who are unkind to those they love, and poor little Tafano, from having tried to make friends with his master, now always shrunk away from him.

“Well! what news?” asked Pietro, giving his wife no other salutation, as he passed on to the balcony and began gathering the flowers as was his wont, which, having done, he seated himself opposite Bianca and repeated his question.

“I am a bad person to come to for news,” replied she, with a faint smile, “for I seldom see any one.”

It was evident that Bonaventuri had something to say, but did not know how to say it; so, continuing to arrange the flowers he had gathered, he said in an embarrassed, abrupt manner, accompanied by a lengthened yawn,

“ You never sing to me now.”

“ You never ask me now—but *shall* I sing to you?” said Bianca, delighted to think that he had even remained with her sufficiently long to make the request, though she saw, by the more than usual splendour of his dress, that he had no intention of passing the evening at home.

“ Aye, do !” said he, tilting back his chair, stretching out his arm and handing her her mandolin, that was lying on a small ebony and ivory table behind him.

As she bent over the instrument to tune it, her doing so concealed those involuntary tears, which never failed to offend her husband, though, having his eyes fixed upon the flowers he was arranging for his mistress, he was not likely to observe them—but Tafano might, had he not curled himself up to sleep at her feet, while she sang the following song:—

When I think of those fond vows all broken,
And the hopes of which now there's no gleam,
I ask, were such words ever spoken?
Or was our love only a dream?

*Did I dream, that when kneeling before me,
You said your life centred in mine?
And that when you could cease to adore me,
The stars would forget how to shine?*

*Did I dream, that when crowds were assembled,
Of all that was lovely and fair,
You whisper'd—and then your voice trembled—
That I was the loveliest there?*

*Did I dream, that no change could I ever
E'en make in a flower or a gem,
But some leaf, or some link, you would sever,
As mementoes of me, and of them?*

*Now, alas! I may wear what I list,
Unheeded my smiles or my tears,
If absent, I never am miss'd,
So have banish'd my hopes, and your fears!*

*If the rest was a dream, let me sleep
The slumber that knows no awaking;
Since to wake seems but one, with to weep
The slowness the heart hath in breaking!*

“I hate that sort of doleful ditties!” said Bonaventuri, as soon as Bianca ceased singing, peevishly flinging the leaves and stalks of the flowers he did not want through the open window. “Has the Grand Duke been here to-day?”

“I have not seen him.”

“Then you ought to have seen him—at least you ought to receive him a little more civilly, than you do, when he *does* come. By

San Antonio! he is a miracle of patience and goodnature to bear such treatment.

"Surely," replied Bianca, "you know the Duke's character too well, to wish him to visit here on more intimate terms than he does?"

Bonaventuri, somewhat embarrassed, if not abashed, by so straight-forward a question, parried it by bursting into a laugh, and saying,

"I wonder if my old fool of an aunt Sylvestro continues to lavish sighs on him for his ungrateful return of wishing her in the infernal regions."

"I certainly wonder," said Bianca, "that her husband does not remark, and then speak to her about her folly."

"Why, poor old man, he is so far an orator, that, like Demosthenes, he is certainly averse to *extemporary speaking*; for a word never comes out of his mouth, that his amiable sposa has not first put into it—and she has equal dominion over his ears and eyes."

"Lonely as I am here, it is a relief to have got away from that woman, who, begging your pardon, Pietro, was in every way disgusting."

"You need not beg my pardon, for I despise the woman heartily, and neither want to defend her hypocrisy, vanity, stinginess, falsehood, nor inebriety. But in complaining of loneliness, it is strange that you have not contrived to make

any friends here ; and indeed, from their total desertion, it would appear that you could have had none in Venice either," added Bonaventuri, with a sneer.

How inexplicable are the mysteries of the human heart—how long, and how much, will it unchangingly endure, of unkindness, injustice, and neglect ; and yet, at some critical moment, a word, a tone, a look, like that of the Medusa, is sufficient to change its softest yearnings into eternal stone ! Affection, at least, is a pearl, which often passes uninjured through every other species of ill-usage, and yet dissolves instantly in the sharp acid of a taunt.

At this most unfeeling speech, Bianca felt a great and painful revulsion take place within her. The mighty anchor of Hope, which had hitherto moored her very soul as it were to her husband, had now with a sudden shock given way, and her heart seemed drifted about in a tempest of indignation, agony, and despair !

" If," said she, for the first time, addressing him with bitterness of tone and words, "*If* I have no friends, who is the cause of it?—*you* ! *If* I desire to have none, who is the cause of it?—*you* ! If I am despised, who is the cause of it?—*you* ! If I am wretched, who is the

cause of it?—*you!* If I am hopeless, who is the cause of it?—*you!* If I *become wicked*, who will have been the cause of it?—*you—you—you!* Pietro Bonaventuri!”

“Go on, madam—go on,” said the unfeeling husband, folding his arms with insulting calmness, “my curiosity is piqued; it is the first time I have seen you in the character of a Fury—and I assure you it is not at all becoming; however, for there is no accounting for taste, perhaps your *friend*, the Grand Duke, may think otherwise; and if so, I advise you to secure him, for such *Inamoratos* are not found every day, *addio bel Iramontano, felice sera.*” And with this insulting speech, he adjusted his ruff, and prepared to leave the room.

“Pietro!” almost shrieked Bianca, as she rushed after him and detained him by the cloak, “only unsay what you have just said, and I will bless you, and love you, as long as I live.”

“Unsay what?—that you looked like a Fury.”

“No, no! that you wished to sell me to the duke.”

“Notwithstanding my apprenticeship to Salviati, I do not remember to have made use of so mercantile a word.”

“Nay, cavil not at words; your purport was

the same; did you not tell me to secure the duke as my innamorato?"

"Well; and was it not civil of me, to urge you to promote any arrangement of the kind you might have in view?"

"One word for all," said Bianca, from whose cheek the crimson flush had receded, having given place to a deadly pallor and a fixed cold glare in her eyes, "one word for all; do you mean to say that *you* are sincere in urging me to become the mistress of Francesco de Medici?"

"One word for all then. I am under obligations to Francesco de Medici."

"And you would repay them with your wife!"

"I would repay them, as all obligations ought to be repaid; with what the obliger most wishes for, or wants. Besides I am not the dog in the manger, and have no objection to give to a friend, that which I do not want myself."

During the first part of this speech, Bianca had looked, breathlessly up into his face, as though her existence hung upon his words; but at its disgusting termination, her fingers mechanically relaxed their grasp of his cloak. He left the room—and left her—an ALTERED

BEING ! all her softness of character had vanished, her devotion, her long suffering was gone ;—there she stood a bold, brave, woman, ready to play the game of life on the world's terms.

The bloom of delicacy on a woman's mind is like the impalpable down on a butterfly's wing, which, once rudely brushed off, never returns. Proportionate to the hitherto depth of her love for her unworthy husband, was now the intensity of her hate, and deadly, though vague, the schemes she revolved for evincing it ; but, with him, she hated the whole world, and, as she paced the room, like " an embodied storm," she laughed aloud, with an almost fiendish laugh, at the thought of the thorns she would plant in the path of the cold, passionless, but irreproachable and unoffending, Joan of Austria.

" Henceforth," said she, raising her voice, though she had no auditors but her dogs and her flowers, " there shall be *no* happy wives ; the very name of wife shall be a blot and a blister, only to be healed by the power and the triumphs contained in that of mistress ! There shall be merry doings in Florence when I sway the helm : the nobles shall no longer have to laugh at their sovereign's dull parsimonious court, even though the people should find cause

to weep over his extravagance—ha! ha! ha!” And she sunk down, physically exhausted, into the chair that stood by the open window; for no exercise produces more extreme bodily fatigue than the conflicting agonies of mental strife.

She had scarcely been seated two minutes, before a crumpled paper was thrown in at the window, and fell at her feet. She picked it up, and opened it, there just being sufficient twilight left to enable her to decipher anything that might be written upon it; but only one sentence to the following effect, in an unknown hand, met her view:—

BIANCA CAPPELLO, YOU HAVE THIS HOUR OPENED THE SECOND VOLUME OF YOUR FATE!

“Then, by my faith,” said she, repeating the words she had just read, “if the second volume bear any resemblance to the first, be it never so slight a one, I would rather close the book at once, and for ever, than continue to turn over its miserable pages.”

So saying, she arose and looked out of the window, to see if she could discover the person who had thrown the paper bearing so mysterious a sentence, and apparently one implying so much knowledge of her fate. She looked first up the street, and then down it, but without

discovering any one but a contadino urging home a tired mule, which was drawing a cart with several empty wine barrels, and a burley *frate*, who was arranging his white surplice over his portly paunch, which, from its unwieldy size, seemed to have inflated into rebellion at the additional fast days, *giorne magri*, enjoined by his order.

She was about to turn from the window, when the light of the rising moon fell upon a tall figure, under an opposite porch, muffled in a dark cloak, looking cautiously around. This figure emerged from the doorway into the street, and, as the wind blew aside the mass of black plumes which hung on one side of his hat, Bianca beheld the pale, handsome, but almost unearthly, features of the mysterious stranger whom she had seen once, and only once, in the ruined chapel of Fuzino, on the morning of her ill-fated marriage. Convinced that this strange being, whoever he was, and who always seemed at a moment's notice, and in the most unaccountable manner, to mix himself in her affairs, must be the writer of the sentence she had just read, she called loudly after him,

“ Signor, Signor, Stranger ! await ! ”

But the person so addressed neither turned, retarded, or hastened, his progress, but walked

steadily on towards the Piazza, where he turned into one of the cloisters of Santo Spirito, and disappeared from her view. For some seconds she clung to one of the stone balustrades of the balcony, gazing after him but in vain.

“ ’Tis strange! very strange!” said she, at length, re-entering the room, and re-seating herself in the chair.

During her absence, a page had brought in lights, and she was not sorry for it, as she looked cautiously around, fearing she knew not what; but, certain it was, that even the dwarf’s small shadow, as he brought in a salver of *sorbets* a few minutes after, startled her more than she liked to own.

“ Good Nano,” she said, “ do you know I have seen an apparition?”

“ Indeed! Then by the Holy Inquisition, its racks, and *vedovas*, I hope, Signora, that it was that of the Signor Pietro Bonaventuri.”

“ Not so; it must have been the phantom of some scrivener, for it flung me a paper with strange writing on it.”

“ Then, by the four Evangelists, it was no ghost, for those disembodied gentry are not skilled in caligraphy, but leave that black art to flesh and blood; and his Satanic Majesty, who, if a grateful and partial public do not exaggerate

his talents, they say, is the best lawyer amongst them, and always draws up his own bonds so accurately, that it is impossible for time or change, or human ingenuity, to find a flaw in them; so that let the times be ever so bad, he is sure to get his due, when no one else can."

Here a loud ringing was heard at the street-door.

"Ecco," cried Ghirihizzo, "that sounds like a royal ring. Should it be the Grand Duke, Eccellenza, are we to admit him?"

"By all means," said Bianca, rising and arranging her dress before a large mirror, composed of several small lozenge-shaped pieces of glass, in a lattice-work of gilt ivory, "by all means. Refusals form no part of a royal heritage; and mind, should the Signora Sylvestro come, I am out; but if your master should return and ask for me, I am engaged, and cannot be disturbed. Dost understand, good fool?"

"I hear, but for understanding, that is another matter," muttered the dwarf, as he left the room, "for to comprehend the riddles of a woman's caprice, one should be an Œdipus or a Sphinx; but yesterday, it was 'Good Ghirihizzo, should the Duke come, let in even the Sylvestro, and mind you leave the ante-room on no pretext whatever!' While to-night it is,

‘Let in nobody on any account,’ not even the Grand Turk, Bonaventuri himself.” And here he whistled with great glee, as he descended to communicate the orders he had just received, to the porter.

It was no wonder the poor dwarf was mystified; for there was in his mistress’ manner a sort of excited restless composure, if one may be allowed so contradictory a mode of expression, like that of a person under the first influences of laudanum. A crimson spot burnt in the centre of each cheek, while from her lips all colour had fled; and there was a sort of glassy glare in her eyes, that gave to them a painfully unreal expression. All pulsation seemed suddenly suspended, as she stood breathlessly listening for the sound of the Duke’s approaching footsteps, like a person nerved with supernatural courage to unflinchingly endure some dread ordeal, and who yet feared the high-wrought pitch of resolution would unwind, if any delay took place in the execution of the torment.

At length at the expiration of a few seconds, which appeared to her so many hours, the door curtain was pushed aside, and a page backed into the room, preceding the Duke with lights. With an impulse that she could not control,

but which was certainly more muscular than mental, she sprang forward and placed her hand in his. Accustomed as he was to find her always seated, and receiving his greetings with a coldness and dignity of manner, that left him nothing to take advantage of, and still less to hope; Francesco de Medici was enchanted with a change of deportment, which he had not penetration enough to perceive, that from whatever else it might arise, it did not arise from any favourable change of feeling towards himself.

“Beautiful Bianca,” said he, kissing the hand so freely given to him, “this is indeed kind of you. May I at last hope that my love, my adoration, has been infectious? and that the ice around your heart has at length melted, before the fires my true worship has kindled at the shrine of your beauty?”

“Alas! my Lord! Love, however devoted, was never yet infectious, but,”—

“But what?”

Bianca’s only answer was a flood of tears.

Francesco stole his arm, without any resistance on her part, round her waist, as bending his cheek close to her’s, and looking up into her face, he said—

“You weep! Ah! dear—dearest Bianca, if I thought *one* of those tears was for me! I

would never again covet all the smiles you have refused me."

"The tears caused by hatred, were but a bad return for so much *professed* love, methinks."

"And do you then hate me?" said the Duke, "I confess the candour but ill atones for the bitterness of such an acknowledgment."

"Nay, not so, my Lord. Hatred is the last stage of love, and we are but at the beginning of ours."

"There is a happiness in that last little word," said Francesco, "which almost makes me, out of my own superfluity of joy, pity the object of your hate."

"You are right, my Lord, for truly he is most pitiful.—'Tis my husband."

"Your husband! then heaven be praised! he has at length met with his deserts. But since scorn can look so beautiful, waste it not on him, but bury him in cold oblivion; and leave love alone to form the lights and shadows of his own horizon—those dear eyes." Cried the Duke, kneeling, and imprinting a thousand kisses on her hand.

"Rise, my Lord! it befits not Francesco de Medici to kneel to her whom Pietro Bonaventuri, the sculptor's son, has cast from him—

nay, spurned ! as unworthy to share his brightening fortunes; fortunes, which she wrecked her own to follow, and has perished in that wreck."

"No, not perished. Rather say, who Phoenix-like, has risen resplendent from the ashes of an ordeal, that would have consumed a less rare bird. But for the base caitiff, upon whom you have been too long wasted, you have only to speak to have ample revenge."

"Not for worlds, would I take from a higher power the privilege of punishing him, for if there is justice in heaven, he will have his reward," replied Bianca.

"Let me entreat you, my soul's idol," said the Duke, "to think no more of what is so unworthy of you, but bestow some of those precious thoughts upon one who is your slave, and ready to do your slightest or your greatest bidding; think of the many bright years yet before you of your absolute sway over me, and all I possess; and weigh Francesco de Medici and the Duchy of Tuscany, against Pietro Bonaventuri and his ingratitude."

"The latter, my Lord," said Bianca, with less of acrimony than queen-like *hauteur*, "belongs indisputably to me; while the former rich Duchy with its sovereign Duke belong,

as indisputably, to none other but Joan of Austria."

A gloomy expression of displeasure passed over the dark features of Francesco, as he replied, "Not yet, not yet, most lovely lady, curtail not I pray you the short span of freedom the Church and State have left me; and when I am under the Austrian yoke, I shall need no one to remind me of my misfortunes, though I shall then, more than ever, require consolation. Diana of Poitiers, some few short years ago, was, if less beautiful, also less cruel than Bianca Cappello; but then, to be sure, the Duchesse de Valentinois was so much older, that she was also much wiser."

"If, my Lord, you are bent upon getting up a masque of France's second Henry, it may prove sorry mumming, should the Arch-duchess Joan think fit to enact the part of Catherine de Medici."

"Why, then, sweet Raven, if she should, I must be weaker than weak Henry to allow it. But if you will be my Diana, my heart shall be an Ephesus where there shall be but one great goddess, to whom all minor powers must yield."

"Let me see," said Bianca, placing her finger on her lip, and for the first time that even-

ing assuming the arch playfulness of manner which, to the last moment of her existence, possessed the power of captivating her saturnine lover, "let me see; the Duchess of Valentinois was forty one when she first achieved her conquest, and I am just *twenty one* ! (heigh ho ! to think that I have been four years in Florence) a fearful difference, for how many successors shall I have had, my Lord, by the time *I* am forty-one ? "

" By the most lovely mouth that ever defied inconstancy," cried the Duke affecting the same light tone, "*none*. The right succession *cannot* rest with me while you continue thus charming, thus sparkling, most beautiful Bianca."

" *While*, aye, but there's the mooted point, for know you not, my Lord, that Time takes every thing and brings nothing ? "

"Time may destroy every thing but true love."

"True love ! true love with men is a weathercock, which is true to whatever quarter it veers just as long as the wind sets that way, and no longer."

" Rank heresy, though uttered by an angel," replied Francesco, "and for which you deserve to be burnt by the eternal flame you have kin-

dled in my heart ; passing fancies, if you will, are like rose-leaves, sweet, but short-lived, and scattered by every breath ; but that true faith which your infidelity denies, is an acorn, that time only strengthens and increases. But to talk of time is to waste it ; only promise me that it shall yet give me what it has hitherto withheld, your love, and I will leave you now, nor importune you more till your own generosity recalls me."

"I can promise nothing in this room—in this house, which I hate !" said Bianca, turning away her face, in which struggled the expression of a thousand conflicting feelings, shame, pride, indignation, disgust, but above all, despair !

"Then you shall not pass another day in it," said the Duke, "the next time I visit you it shall be in the Villa Stiozzi; only promise me," continued he, trying to snatch a kiss from her averted lips.

"I promise nothing—I give all !" interrupted Bianca, breaking from him. And with these words she rushed out of the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

" These strange and sudden injuries have fallen
So thick upon me, that I lose all sense
Of what they are. Methinks I am not wronged ;
Nor is it aught, if from the censuring world
I can but hide it.—Reputation !
Thou art a word, no more."

BRAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

" ————— Off with my painted honour !
Whilst with vain hopes our faculties we tire,
We seem to melt in ice, and freeze in fire."

WEBSTER.

It was a fearful night that last night that Bianca Cappello passed, of virtue and self-esteem, in the Via Maggio. The agony and remorse of a whole life seemed crowded into those few hours, as the one or the other seldom visited her afterwards, for she lived in an age and a country whose customs and opinions were not likely to impress upon her any lasting horror of the double adultery she was about to commit ; but however geographical right and

wrong may be in action, there is a Mede and Persian law in every breast which **ALTERS NOT!** though too often it is merely to be found in that statute book of nature—conscience,—and is pronounced by the crooked policy of civilization, too rigid to be carried into effect.

It was not till that night when Bianca was about to enter on the second act of her fate, that all the evil, all the wrong, of her ill-assorted marriage struck her, and convinced her how one false step can taint a whole life; but for her elopement with Bonaventuri, who had repaid the sacrifice, as low minds and plebeian blood ever do, with the basest ingratitude and unkindness, she would not then have been on the eve of becoming that degraded thing, the minion of a profligate prince, with every chance of the usual result of such debasing distinction—that of being speedily discarded, and subsiding into contemptible insignificance, or progressing to a lower sphere of vice. Then, as if to sharpen the already too poignant torture of her reflections, the splendid home of her youth arose before her, and her father's nightly "God bless you, child!" rang in her ears with the distinctness of present reality, as she again, in her "mind's eye," beheld the old man, circled with years and ancestral honours: how had she

embittered the one? how was she about to blot the other. Then she thought of Arianna, the good, the kind, the gentle companion of her pure and happy childhood. "Ah!" she exclaimed, "how differently *she* would have acted in my place! but *she* was never tried and tempted as I have been; yes but she was though, for she loved Vittorio, deeply, truly, but with all, virtuously. Oh! love! love! thou fatal fever, whose hot and cold fits alike are madness: thou weaver of webs and entailer of curses, once more I invoke thee! visit me in the form of Francesco de Medici, for with thee to urge me on, I shall not feel so utterly degraded as I do: but *I do not love him*, and in that I now feel consists my chief crime, for 'tis a fool's part to do the devil's work gratis, and yet, however tempting his promises, what are his rewards? Sorrow, shame, disappointment! and of these I have had enough."

Bianca did not love Francesco de Medici, if she had, she would have been doubly wrecked. For, when once a woman lavishes her heart upon a man, she has put him in possession of the enchanted talisman, that was the sceptre of her empire over him, and over herself. The heart in fact is a poor silly Telemachus, which once separated from its Mentor, the head, falls

into every snare that is laid for it; but while they keep together, are more than a match for all they meet. And woe to the woman, who enticed by the Calypso Isles of fair promise (which love conjures up amid his perilous sea of shoals, and quick-sands), surrenders up her heart into the possession of the tempter; as she may rely upon its being first played with, then tortured, and eventually broken.

Six weeks after the interview recorded in the last chapter, saw Bianca installed in the Villa Stiozzi, as mistress to Francesco de Medici, and surrounded by a perfect fairy-land of luxury. It was quite astonishing, the miraculous change this wrought upon almost every individual in Florence, except, indeed, the Signora Sylvestro, who openly reviled her artful machinations, in having robbed her more worthy self of the affections of the Grand Duke.

But of all her now numerous satellites, Signor Millantatore, and Gonzo Damerino, had undergone the most extraordinary change, for the former, who as we have before stated, found his powers of vision so much affected on his first arrival at Florence, as to amount to almost total blindness, had now become so suddenly clear-sighted, that he could (as he himself averred), distinguish Bianca a mile off, from that

noble bearing, the growth of which *he* had had the happiness of watching from its infancy; while Gonzo declared, that he had never known a mind to expand as hers had done, for nothing but the highest order of intellect could have conjured up the perfect Paradise in which she lived; a panegyric which must have been more prophetic, than positive, on the part of the sapient Gonzo, as the grounds which she had planned, were not at that time begun, much less finished. Bonaventuri she had never spoken to, since the last evening she had passed in the Via Maggio, as she had forbidden him to approach her. But while thus virtually severing every tie between them; as a sort of retrograde salvo to her wounded pride, being still nominally her husband, she rather urged the Duke to bestow, than dissuaded him from bestowing, upon Bonaventuri, favours which by bettering his position in the world, approximated his rank in life more towards her own—while he was neither sufficiently proud, nor sufficiently delicate, to scruple at accepting obligations so dishonorably purchased, and which she exacted as her sole revenge, he should always incur the humiliation of asking her intercession to obtain.

Previous to his marriage with the Arch-Duchess Joan, which took place on the six-

teenth of December, 1565, Francesco de Medici tried to veil from the eyes of the public, his liaison with Bianca ; but after that event, thinking there was no longer any necessity for concealment, he introduced the latter publicly at court, and appointed Bonaventuri as his Intendente.

The now openly-exercised tyrannic sway of both the favourite, and her husband, offended not only Cosimo Primo, and the Cardinal Ferdinando de Medici, but also the Court of Austria, whom it behoved the Medicis to humour. The people too, complained bitterly of the insolence, and rapacity of the Intendant, while, his increasing arrogance became so insupportably odious to the courtiers, that their constant complaints, grew alarming in the extreme to his wife, and irksome beyond measure to the Duke, whose only solace, nevertheless, was derived from the source of all his political and domestic annoyances. For Bianca always possessed the power of captivating him, by the charms of her mind, the brilliancy of her wit, the fascination of her manners, and above all the *enjouement* of her character ; for the more the cares, and trammels of government increased the natural gloom, and austerity of his nature, the more craving had he for the excite-

ment of her sparkling society; or the repose, of the, at times, almost childish amusements she indulged in. And as she did not love him sufficiently to feel, much less to complain, of any of his inequalities of humour, she successfully adopted all the wiles of her calling daily to enthrall, captivate, and increase her empire over him; while the poor Grand Duchess—like most neglected wives, who are openly insulted by a mistress,—was not an over agreeable companion, on those rare occasions, when her husband did condescend to honour her with his society. Neither could she stoop to soliciting as favours, those privileges, which she should have commanded as a right; even when by waving her pride, she might have obtained redress for the injured, or relief for the indigent.

This cold undeviating line of conduct, hardened Francesco the more against her, especially as his beautiful, and apparently fond mistress, was seldom without some request to sue for, or some favour to coax him out of, for herself, or for others; all of which were repaid, with those fascinating blandishments, which while they rivetted her power, at the same time put Francesco in good humour with himself; for it is human nature, but especially man's nature, to like being looked up to; and to love those de-

pendent upon them, more it is to be feared from the dependence which flatters, than from the helplessness which endears. Besides Bianca had the tact always to *speak* well of the Grand Duchess, whose negative virtues she invariably brought out, into the broadest, and most favourable light; while at the same time, she had the art to make Joan's cold, and haughty bearing towards herself, transform her into a poor oppressed victim, whom it behoved the Duke to uphold and protect even against the legitimacy of conjugal indignation.

But she had other, and not less effectual weapons, against the unfortunate Grand Duchess. For while, the Pitti was daily assuming, in an increasing degree, the dull rigidity, and punctilious etiquette of the Court of Austria, the Villa Stiozzi had become the *rendezvous* of all that was brilliant in wit, distinguished in talent, profound in science, pre-eminent in art, or attractive in beauty; and Bianca's was the spirit which

“Unsuspected, animated the whole.”

She had also absented herself from court latterly, not so much out of consideration for the Grand Duchess, or in the hope of disarming her most inveterate enemy, the Cardinal Fer-

dinando de Medici, as in the expectation of Francesco's remarking her absence and insisting upon its cessation, nor in this was she disappointed. For the reiterated remonstrances of his brother the Cardinal, upon the scandal he had brought upon the court, by assigning her a prominent position in every festa, and the manner in which she was drawing the treasury by her extravagance, only caused the Duke to raise his favorite still higher, and tax the people still more, in order to defray the expenses of the beautiful grounds he was laying out for her at Pratolino.

One morning as Bianca was sitting in a summer room of white scaglinola and gold, on the ground of the Villa Stiozzi pondering over a letter she had received from the Duchessa D'Urbino, the contents of which distressed her extremely inasmuch as they informed her, that Arianna had left the Duchess about a year ago under the escort of a monk of the order of Loyola, calling himself Ignatius Dragoni, and purporting to be an emissary of Martin Bernardini the Gonfaloniere of Florence, who had set forth a statement claiming Arianna as his niece, and denying her to be the daughter of Giovanni Ferrai the Venetian goldsmith, and that so satisfactory, and apparently conclu-

sive, was this statement that she had left Belri-guardo, with the Jesuit four days after his arrival, and although promising to write to the Duchess, as soon as she reached Florence had never been heard of since, till the day before, when a few lines had been brought to the Duchess at Ferrara, by a Venetian sailor, from Arianna, embroidered on a piece of silk, stating that a few hours after she had quitted Belri-guardo the year before, she and her companion were attacked upon the road by a large body of horsemen, headed by Vittorio Cappello, who succeeded in capturing her, and taking her to Venice, where he embarked with her on the same evening in a merchant vessel, bound for Honfleur in Normandy. That then she was conveyed to an old château near Dreux ; which she had since ascertained belonged to the Marquis de Millepropos and was called the Château de Quillac. That in a grated turret of this castle she had ever since been closely confined, under the *surveillance* of Ferrai, who denied the whole statement of the Jesuit relative to her being the Gonfaloniere's niece, averring that the letter produced with his signature corroborating Martin Bernardini's narrative, was a forgery. What had become of Ignatius she knew not, but supposed he had died by the

road side, of the wounds inflicted by Vittorio Cappello's party. She farther added that since her incarceration in the Château de Quillac she had been refused writing materials, and had seen no one but her jailor, Ferrai, and his employer, the Count Vittorio, that she had worked this statement in the hope that Providence would send her some opportunity of conveying it to the Duchess, whom she implored would write to Bianca Cappello, to find out from the Gonfaloniere whether there was any truth in the Jesuit's story; and if so, that he would get the Grand Duke to use his influence with Catherine de Medici, to obtain a warrant for searching the Château de Quillac, and restoring her to her friends.

It was with this letter in her hand that Bianca was sitting impatiently awaiting the Grand Duke's daily visit, determined to use her influence in behalf of Arianna, before Martin Bernardini could have time to make his application, when the door opened, and Signor Millantatore was announced. Now it is necessary to premise that this distinguished individual had one very original trait of character, which was a perfect horror of having it supposed that there was any single occurrence either of a private or public nature, could take place in the world,

without *his* having been previously *au fait* to the facts, even before the parties concerned had acquired the slightest knowledge of them. Thus no sooner was any political event throughout Europe publicly announced, such as a change of ministry through the demise of one sovereign, or accession of another, or any less imperative cause, than he would retire to the solitude of his own chamber, and then, and there indite himself a confidential epistle, anti-dating it several months, weeks, or sometimes years as the case might require, therein divulging the important changes *likely* to take place and accurately detailing the names of persons who figured prominently at an ulterior period. But was it an elopement, or family secret, of however mysterious a nature; when it *did* transpire it never surprised *him*, because *he* had been aware of the facts ages, before, although, as in honour bound, he had preserved the strictest and most inviolable silence about them.

The worthy Signor's appearance corresponded admirably with his character; his face being as round as his assertions, his hair was red, his features small, and a certain cleft or dimple in his chin, seemed the stamp where humbug had set her finger to mark him for her own. In all his narrations, the brilliancy of his

imagination was wont to supply the paucity of reality ; but it was on the art of flattery that he most plumed himself. For example, if he paid a visit, to an elderly lady of unwieldy circumference, he invariably started back on approaching her, whereupon the fat lady would naturally inquire the cause of his dismay ? to which after a short *scena* of well acted reluctance he would reply : “ Why, you are grown so dreadfully thin, even at the fear of offending you, *too* thin I should say for your height.” But if the rencontre was with the mother of a pretty, but dwarfish daughter, then it was, “ Forgive me, Signora, knowing what the anxiety of your maternal feelings must be, I know not if I am warrantable in remarking upon the too rapid growth of the Signorina ; but *I* should say it was too much for her strength ; and if I *might* advise, I should recommend her being taken to a more bracing air.” Now it so happened that Millantatore was a good classical scholar, consequently, whenever his vanity led him to compose a Latin oration in answer to the various controversies of the time, he invariably took it to the proverbially greatest dunce of his acquaintance, saying, “ My good friend, pardon my importuning you, but I wished to reap the benefit of your classic lore, by any suggestions

you might be kind enough to give me on this little treatise of mine."

So much for this worthy; his sapient stepson, Gonzo, on the contrary, disdained all these amiabilities; he was a man of fixed ideas, which was lucky; as it was the only means by which the world discovered that he had any ideas at all. If any of his acquaintance expressed to him their intention of visiting Egypt, England, Spain, or any other country, no matter how completely they might ultimately alter their plans, Gonzo could by no means be prevailed upon to relinquish his preconceived notions of their movements, upon which he would descant, animadvert, or laud, as he thought fit; despite the reiterated asseverations of the person to whom he was speaking, that the individual about whom he was conversing, had *not* carried into execution, his or her original intention. Still Gonzo's reply was to his own rooted idea. "So absurd you know, my dear Sir, for a man of B's time of life, to even think of going into Egypt."

"But I tell you, Signor Gonzo, that he is *not* gone; that to please his wife he gave up all idea of going, and is now at his villa near Viareggio."

"Then, to think of a person who, like him,

is subject to a determination of blood to the head, braving the dangers of an Egyptian sun !”

“ My dear Signor Gonzo, there is no Egyptian sun at Viareggio, and B. is there with his family.”

“ Aye—there again ! to go in opposition to his whole family ! I cannot think what some people are made of.”

“ Nor I either, especially B., who must indeed be a strange animal, to be in two places at once.”

“ Two places at once !—What, then, are there double Pyramids in Egypt ? ”

And so Gonza would go on for hours, till the patience or laughter of his audience was exhausted, though not so his pertinacity. But we must not leave his worthy stepsire longer at the door.

“ To see you, Bella Donna,” said Cianciare, bowing himself into the room, and placing his cap before his eyes, as if oppressed with a sudden blaze of light, “ is to behold the sun at noonday, and to feel all the danger we have incurred by our temerity in gazing on it.”

“ There then,” replied Bianca, smiling, as she struck him, not too gently, with her fan, “ receive that *coup de soleil*, and when you have recovered from it, sit down and listen to a most

wonderful history that I have this morning heard."

Millantatore obeyed, and placed his chair opposite to hers.

"You remember," resumed Bianca, "my pretty Arianna Ferrai, at Venice?"

"I remember Arianna Ferrai, perfectly," replied Millantatore, casting round his right eye in a manner peculiar to himself, "but as for remembering anything beautiful in Venice, beyond your gracious self, it is impossible, for your beauty being so great, the space it occupies in one's memory is equally great, and leaves no room for anything else."

"So it would seem—not even for common sense; but enough of my beauty, Signor Millantatore, which must indeed be dazzling, since I remember instances, and those not very long ago, of its so completely blinding some of my acquaintance, as to prevent their recognising me, though I passed them never so closely. However, it is of Arianna I would speak: she is not Ferrai's daughter at all—and who, think you, she turns out to be?"

Millantatore bit his lip, cast down his eyes, and remained silent, as if virtuously resolved that *nothing should be extracted from him*.

"Why Martin Bernardini's niece."

Cianciare was indeed surprised at so unexpected an announcement, but far from letting any expression of the sort, which might have betrayed ignorance, appear in his countenance or manner; he merely shrugged his shoulders, and rollingly raised his right eye, much in the same manner as an eclipse passes over the moon, as he replied,

“Oh! I was aware of that fact many years ago.”

“Aware of it!—Then how on earth could you allow poor Arianna to labour under the stigma of being that wretch Ferrai’s daughter?”

“Signora Bianca,” said he, rising with an air of what he intended to be great dignity, as, after twitching his cloak slightly to the left, he folded his arms, “Signora Bianca, had I not made it a rule through life never even to hint, by word or look, much less to divulge the many, I may say the *innumerable*, both private and public secrets, that have been confided to me in the strictest confidence—a confidence which I am proud to say has in no instance or on any one occasion ever been violated—the world in general, and society in particular, would not be as it now is.” And, so saying, this deputy divinity, from whom no secrets were hid, re-seated himself energetically.

“At all events,” resumed Bianca, strange to say not so much awed as might have been expected by such a combination of discretion and dignity, “at all events, satisfy me upon one point, is Arianna the daughter of the Gonfaloniere’s sister or brother?”

Now, as it may be supposed, never having heard that she was his niece, till informed of the fact two minutes before by Bianca, this was rather a puzzling question for poor Signor Millantatore, who required a few seconds to determine upon what parentage he should give her. But with the lively impetus of that inventive genius, for which he was so distinguished, having on the present occasion been consulted as an oracle, he resolved that his answer should be oracular; therefore, deliberately shaking his head three times, he replied,

“Excuse me; difficult as it is to refuse you anything, I am resolved that no part of this long-dormant mystery in the Bernardini family shall ever be spoken of by me, till the Gonfaloniere himself chooses to divulge it.”

“But surely, as Martin Bernardini himself acknowledged that Arianna is his niece, there can be no breach of confidence in telling me how the relationship exists.”

“It may be, nay, I won’t dispute that it is,

an over-scrupulous feeling on my part, but such as it is, not even the most lovely lady in the world," said Cianciare, bowing to the very ground, "can tempt me to swerve from it."

Bianca began to have a faint suspicion of the reality of the case, and the utter impossibility that existed for the worthy Signor's giving her the information she wanted, inasmuch as that he himself was ignorant of it. But knowing that he really was *au fait* to the gossip of the town, and therefore had no scruple in repeating it, she generally felt the pulse of the public through him.

"Well, then, Signor Millantatore," said she "though you will not answer me on the matter I have questioned you. What news? for news is public property. Does the Grand Duchess grow in the liking of her people, or is it otherwise? For Tuscan wines and tongues are both sharp ;—how wag the latter?"

"Certes, not as dogs wag their tails, with joy; for the Grand Duchess is more disliked every day."

"Ha! say you so. What fault find they with her?"

"First, for it is always small things that cause great complaints, they accuse her of not

bowing to the people; though their caps be worn out in salutations."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Ghirihizzo, who was arranging some flowers on the steps leading from the window, "bravo! that accounts for the *Traffico del Cappelli* flourishing as it does."

"Peace! knave," cried Bianca, as with a deep blush, she turned to Milantatore, and said "Then she must be perfect, if she has no other fault."

"Not so, for they say she is the only newly married Grand Duchess, who never obtained the release of a single prisoner, or visited a single charitable institution."

"If the poor Grand Duchess is so roughly handled, I fear it must fare still worse with me. Speak out, Signor, nor fear to disoblige, for offence exists not, where none is meant."

"Well, since you press it, I will not disguise from you, Signora," replied Millantatore, with an amiable air of indisputable candour which he always assumed, the farther he got from the truth, "that you do not escape popular animadversion."

This, at least, was true, for he had that morning heard the no very gentle murmurings of several hundred country people, in

the straw market, against her, (whom the Cardinal de Medici did not scruple even in his public edicts, to style La Destabile Bianca), for the additional impost levied upon them for standing room for their bundles of straw ; which was, as they said, one of the many iron mills, invented to grind money out of the people, to meet the extravagance of the Favorite.

“ Well, what say they, Signor ? Fear not that the words will prove mortal, for my ears are constructed upon the plan of the whispering staircase at Poggio Cajano, were no sounds reach farther than discretion would have them.”

“ You show your sense, Signora, for the rabble is a savage beast, whose cries are more calculated to deafen, than to gain attention ; but if you *will* have it, they say ‘ they wonder La Bianca does not counteract the dull influence of Austrian gloom that pervades the Pitti, by making the Duke give more masques and pageants than he does ; with an extra Festa now and then to the people.’ ”

“ Indeed ! Heaven keep them in this whim, good souls ; by all I have hitherto heard, a new one ; and they shall not lack what they are so willing to pay for.”

“ If you will but act upon this principle, in all things, Bellissima,” said Millantatore, “ I

shall not long lack the Cross of San Stefano,* as I assure you I am quite willing to pay for it, would you but say one word for me to the Duke, and having been three years a galley slave, I shall be yours for life, if you manage this."

"Your request shall be considered; but the Duke I know has lately resolved to bestow honours with a more sparing hand, least they should become so common as to get out of fashion, and pensions be demanded instead," replied Bianca, in the courtier-like manner she had lately adopted, of hedging every favour with a difficulty, to enhance the obligation to the person on whom it was conferred.

"His Highness is quite right, *generally* speaking, but mine has been a request of particularly long standing," said Cianciare.

"Then lest it should be *tired*," replied Bianca, with a smile, "I'll set it down in these

* The Order of San Stefano, is no longer a purchaseable Order; but in that of San Giuseppe, the Florentine gentry find a good investment for their money. Originally the Cavalieri of San Stefano, who were instituted by Cosimo Primo, to defend the Mediterranean against Turks and Corsairs, by means of galleys, (on board of which each knight was obliged to serve three years, ere he could finally be admitted into the order), but when peace was established between Barbary and Tuscany, the knights and their galleys became useless; and the latter were broken up and destroyed in 1755.

tablets, and remind the Duke of it the first opportunity."

"A thousand thanks, Illustrissima," said Millantatore, kissing her hand, preparatory to his taking leave.

As he was in the act of doing so, a loud ringing, and the trampling of horses' feet in the Via de la Scala, announced the arrival of the Duke, to whom Millantatore remained to make his salutations, and then backed and bowed himself obsequiously out of the room. No sooner were they alone, than Bianca seated herself beside Francesco; the additional gloom of whose countenance, showed that he was not in the happiest frame of mind.

"Caro," said she, coaxingly laying her head upon his shoulder, while with her small white hand she parted the hair off his forehead; "I see the shadows of the black eagle's wing, and the Cardinal's hat, are upon you. Drive them away; for I have one,—two,—three! favors to ask you, which under their influence, I fear will never be granted." And as she enumerated the one, two, three; she punctuated each number with a kiss upon the Duke's forehead, whose knit brows gradually relaxed, as he returned the kisses, and said with a faint smile,

"Well, my sweet one, what are they? For

though Ferdinando has been howling like a wolf all the morning about finance and the court of Austria, which he seems to consider as two of my seven deadly sins, and the half of his own four cardinal virtues. Yet as long as there is a zechino in the treasury, and that sunny smile on your countenance, Ferdinando may croak, and the black eagle flap its ill-omened wings in vain. So now let my Aquila d'Oro, my golden eagle, take what flight she pleases."

Thus encouraged, Bianca related to him the fact of Arianna's being the Gonfaloniere's niece; and implored him to lose no time in acquainting Martin Bernardini with the place of her imprisonment; and writing to Catherine de Medici, to obtain an order for having the Chateau de Quillac searched.

"Yes, that I'm aware of, for the Duchessa D'Urbino also wrote to Bernardini," replied the Duke, "But diavolo! I quite forget about writing to our cousin, at Paris; but will send off a courier to her this very day. However, I suppose there is not much time lost, as the Gonfaloniere was with us this morning, having just received advices from our Confessor, Padre Ignatius, who hath been lying grievously ill of a broken arm, and divers sorry wounds, for the last ten months, at a Carthusian monastery

near Ferrara, where he was attacked by your brother and a band of armed men last year. Martin Bernardini, by the way, is furious against Count Vittorio, and has sent off a challenge to him, insisting upon his giving him battle in single combat, six months from this date, in the Giardino Rucellai. But I was going to tell you that I had sent by the Gonfaloniere's courier, a letter for Padre Ignatius to present to Catherine; so that will ensure him a favourable reception at the Louvre, even should he reach Paris before my separate letter to the Queen Mother arrives."

"Then that matter is safe," said Bianca, "but I much fear me my intemperate brother will be no match for such a man-at-arms as the Gonfaloniere when mounted, for he masters the noble animal of which Vittorio knows little beyond the name."

"It is impossible for us," replied Francesco, "to quell Martin Bernardini's resentment, but we will do our best to mitigate it. So now, cara, as time presses (for we have many letters to prepare for Spain, and our confessor not being here, who generally prevents our falling into any of Philip's cunningly baited traps, all the trouble of caution falls upon ourselves) be

brief with your two remaining wishes, that we may turn them into realities if it be possible."

"To a fair loyal heart like yours, all things are possible that rest within its will, so you must not say me '*nay*'—'tis an ugly word, that leaves a blight upon the lips, which withers every kiss—so good, my Lord, avoid it."

"What, by kissing first, my chaffinch?" said the Duke, with the first genuine smile that had illumined his features that morning. "But that I may not be cheated in the fact, canst tell how many kisses go to a pound?"

"Gramercy! were you not the Duke of Tuscany, I should say you were the Jew merchant in one of the *Belle Giornate*, who drew a bond of forfeiture for a pound of flesh! Nathless, he was outwitted by a woman—so I cry you largess, my Lord," replied Bianca, laughing.

"Name it—and be thou Jew and woman, all in one, which were too much odds against the very devil, thou shalt have it."

"Thanks—ten thousand thanks, mine own dear Prince. I like these unmortgaged promises made beforehand; they are right royal edicts, which there's no revoking—so listen to what you are to do, for if she is disappointed, the poor *Aquila D'oro* will grow sad and sorry, and

moult all her feathers," said she, throwing her arm round Francesco's neck.

"Nay," cried he, kissing every separate dimple of the pretty little hand that hung down over his right shoulder, "with my neck in such a velvet halter, I am ready to do anything."

"Then sign me an order to see the prison, with an authority to release any three prisoners whom I may think deserving of their freedom."

The Duke's brows were again knit, and a dark expression overshadowed his face as he took the pen from Bianca's hand, and paused for a few seconds before he complied with her request.

"We had rather, *mia colomba*," said he, "that you had asked us anything else, for the strong walls of the Palazzo della Podesta are the safest place for the disaffected varlets who find their way into them. And plague take them, but the knaves are all disaffected now-a-days."

"Such as are so may still remain, but hunger disaffects many a poor wretch that were right loyal if well fed," said Bianca, with a sigh, as she felt a compunctious spasm through her heart, at the recollection of how her boundless extravagance had helped to op-

press the people and fill that prison which she now made a parade of visiting—not so much from humanity, as from the unworthy desire of acquiring a momentary popularity at the expense of the Grand Duchess.

“And *must* I write this warrant?” said the Duke, looking up into the beautiful face that was bending over him like a destroying angel, with a secret but irresistible power to force him which ever way it marshalled.

“Even so, dearest ; for ’twere a scandal that the Duke of Tuscany should break the promises of Francesco de Medici.”

“Love is too subtle a logician for dull prudence to cope with. So as needs must, sweet love, dictate what you please,” replied Francesco, with a smile, as he wrote down the words that Bianca repeated, which, when he had finished, he said—“And now for thy third boon ; only take heed to limit thy dear wishes to this earth, for in heaven I have no power.”

“Fear not, I will not tax your generosity so far ; my present wish is but a grain in the balance. I want to give a masque in these gardens.”

“With all my heart,” said the Duke, “provided you will wait till the water works are

finished, for I have a plan in my head that will cool the ire of some of Ferdinando's and our liege sposa's satellites—ha! ha! ha!" And Francesco indulged in a fit of laughter very unusual to him.

"Let me hear it, that I may laugh too?" interposed Bianca.

"Nay, my secret is my own, and even thou must not know it, least the effect should be marred."

"Well, well, as my gracious Lord lists, so as I but have my way in the arrangements of this festa; for all the world have heard of fairy-land, but I'm determined they shall see it."

"So be it, and now farewell, my queen of hearts!" said Francesco, rising reluctantly, "but one thing I had nearly forgotten; Mil-lantatore has been pressing again for his cross of San Stefano."

"*Povero pappagalla!* poor parrot," exclaimed the Duke, "if crosses are what he wants, let him eschew honours and make love, and I warrant he'll get enough of them."

"True," laughed Bianca, "but as he is destined to pay for his folly in either instance, the zecchinis his ambition may cost him, will be something towards my festa; whereas let him

pay never so dearly in the other instance, the cost will be of no service to any but himself."

"Once more good bye, dearest," said Francesco, imprinting a kiss upon Bianca's beautiful forehead, at the door, as she placed a sprig of flowering myrtle in his vest.

'Why do I not love him?' said she, when she was again alone; 'he gives me every thing. I ought to love him. Is it that he is like the sun, whose rich gifts we like, yet think no more of the donor than to admit him or exclude him as fancy dictates? I wish I *could* love him!'

CHAPTER IX.

“ Oh ! ruined promise of a brighter hour !
Oh ! throb of honour, ill exchanged for power ! ”

KENTON.

“ What a hell of witchcraft lies
In the small orb of one particular tear ! ”

SHAKSPEARE'S LOVER'S COMPLAINT.

No sooner had the Duke departed, than Bianca rang a golden bell, that stood on a small silver table near her, which had been the work of Benvenuto Cellini, and intended as a present by Francis the First to his mother ; but Cosmo de Medici seeing it, purchased it, and would not allow it to leave Florence. The bell with which Bianca now summoned the dwarf, had been Francesco's last gift ; it was the form and size of a tulip ; the crimson streaks of the flower being represented by large stripes of uncut rubies, while the handle, which was about two inches long, and cut so as to resemble a

stem, was formed out of a single emerald of the finest water; the clapper, instead of being made of gold like the bell itself, was composed of a single brilliant, about the size of a small grape, which produced, when rung against the gold, a strangely musical chime, not unlike the mysterious music of a dream.

“There is no denying that he hath a dainty taste in baubles,” soliloquised the fair owner of this pretty toy, as she continued to swing it to and fro, more from the pleasure of hearing its harmonious sounds than from any impatience to have her summons obeyed.

“True,” said the dwarf, entering in haste, somewhat alarmed by the continued ringing, “true, Signora, as you are a living proof.”

“Hold thy peace, knave, and tell the serving men to get ready to attend me through the streets, and do thou likewise; and see that I have the blue and gold *baldacchino** to-day, and six pages.”

Again alone, Bianca began to indulge in the pleasing thought of seeing Arianna. “Dear Arianna!” she exclaimed, “thou art now my equal. *My* equal, alas! how much my superior! for vice and thou are still unacquainted.” And dark thoughts overshadowed her heart, as

* Canopy.

she conjured up her past and present existence, in the retrospect of which she was disturbed by the re-entrance of Ghiribizzo, to announce that all was in readiness for her progress through the city.

In those days when Paris boasted but two carriages, or "*coches*," one belonging to Catherine de Medici, the other to Diana of Poitiers, London none at all, and Florence only three, belonging to the Grand Duke, his brother the Cardinal, and the Archbishop; it was customary for the *Signoria* to supply the place of modern equipages, by numerous richly dressed *pursuivants* and pages, and gorgeously embroidered canopies. The *baldacchino*, or canopy, now waiting for Bianca, was composed of sky-blue velvet, embroidered in golden fleurs de lys, and the Medici arms on each of the four sides, every ball of which was of gold, but hollow, though of a substantial thickness; intermixed with the velvet draperies and gold fringe of the canopy, were hangings of the most delicate and costly lace, and the top of the canopy inside, which was lined with white satin, was also covered with a still finer lace, the pattern of which represented a trellis work of vine leaves, with a centre of the Loves of Bacchus and Ariadne. The poles, by which the *baldac-*

chino was supported, were of silver gilt, but twisted into waves, like the pillars in San Marks at Venice. Four pages dressed in blue and gold, upheld the four poles of the canopy, while the other two walked, one at each side of Bianca; he on the right-hand swinging to and fro a large *flacon*, made of embossed gold and precious stones, in the form of an incense burner; the long chains of which were formed of alternate links of emeralds and gold. The page on the left held a large fan of white peacock's feathers, made so as to resemble the form of that bird's tail when spread; and in the centre of each feather, where the eye was faintly marked by nature, the jeweller had placed a sapphire. The handle of this fan was the bird itself, made of filigreed silver, the crown on whose head was imitated in small brilliants, at the end of elastic silver wires, that shook with every movement, which, with the eyes, that were of dark uncut rubies, gave it a strong resemblance to life. Beside these pages on each side of the canopy, walked twelve serving men, or *lacchéi*, dressed in the gorgeous Medici livery of crimson velvet and gold slashed with blue satin; the arms embroidered in gold on the left side of their cloaks, and one golden *fleur de lys* fastening in the blue plume in their caps. Over their white leather gauntlets was a net

work of gold, and a deep gold fringe at the cuffs. Though it was daylight, each man held an unlit torch in a large silver sconce, which was indispensable to an Italian *lacché* of the sixteenth century.

Under the canopy walked Bianca herself, her dress was a tissue of gold, shot with a bright emerald green and purple silk, so that as she walked, the glossy sheen turned its golden lining to the sun, and she seemed to move in light. The stiff tight body and sleeves were covered with a perfect chain armour of jewellery, while down the robings of the dress on each side glittered bunches of acorns and oak leaves, the acorns the size of small real ones, done in single pearls, and the leaves in sparkling emeralds of the finest water. Her ruff was snowy white, and was composed of a light vapoury texture, that looked as if a breath would dissolve it, which had lately been invented at Paris under the name of *amour passager*. The brilliants in her ears were long, and of that fanciful and allegorical kind, so much the fashion in the sixteenth century, the design being a diamond Cupid snatching at a ruby heart which formed the upper part of the earring that went into the ear. Her beautiful hair was turned off her forehead, highly frizzed and

studded with jewels according to the disfiguring fashion of the day ; while from the back of her head appended a veil, made of the same material as her ruff, but spotted over with glittering beetle's wings that matched her dress ; at the four corners of this veil were strung tassels of real pearls and emeralds, to carry one of these in each hand was the province of Ghiribizzo. On her hands, were a pair of highly perfumed gloves of white *moire* embroidered on the backs with a *mazzetto di fiori*, or "*posy*", of precious stones, while on the fore and little fingers of each hand outside the glove, one large costly ring.

Thus attired and attended, Bianca proceeded to the Via Palagio, where the prison was situated, receiving the frequent salutations of the people, who mistook her for the Grand Duchess : for it was not one of the least of Joan of Austria's causes of complaint, that the pomp and state of the favorite was such a fac simile of her own, as to be undistinguishable the one from the other. But the mortification this produced was not always on the side of the Duchess, as Bianca was destined to experience on the present occasion, for as she was turning from the Via del Corso into the Via Pelagio, the progress of her retinue was suddenly arrested by the

slow and stately approach of the Cardinal de Medici's coach with its six white horses. Bianca and her people drew up to one side of the street to make way for the ponderous equipage to pass ; while the Cardinal mistaking her *bal-dacchino* for that of the Grand Duchess instantly put his head out of the door, and holding his scarlet velvet hat before his eyes, to guard them from the sun, rang the bell for the coach to stop. It had no sooner done so, than the four lacchès, who were ranged abreast like a standing army behind the vehicle, descended and stood at each side of the coach door, to assist the Cardinal to alight, a ceremony which occupied a much longer time down those perpendicular narrow wooden steps, than the descent from any modern carriage could possibly do.

Having at length reached *terra firma*, his Eminence walked with a dignified but alert step through a lane of *lacchès* and pages, towards the canopy which he approached with extended hands as if intent upon greeting his sister-in-law in the most friendly manner possible, but he no sooner perceived his mistake, as Bianca stood blushing and trembling before him, than he replaced his hat upon his head, and raising his hands, said,

"Heaven, pardon me for insulting the Grand Duchess by such a mistake!"

Bianca nettled by so public a reproof replied, with some acrimony, "Courtesy is such an unusual weapon with your Eminence, that you cannot be surprised at its missing its aim, whereas from constant practice your malice is unerring."

"Not so, or I would long since have stopped your career as I have this day stopped your vain pageant," replied the Cardinal, turning haughtily away to regain his carriage.

"And perhaps," rejoined Bianca as she moved onwards after him, "with the same result."

"What result?" said he, turning round as he placed his foot on the first step of the coach.

"*To find your mistake,*" replied Bianca, bowing lowly as she turned into the Via Palagio.

"*Non c'è male* — that is not bad, Grand Duchess of Tuscany," said a voice in the crowd, whose low, clear tones Bianca thought she had heard before.

"Who spoke?" asked she, turning hastily round to Ghiribizzo.

"No one but you, Eccellenza, and his Eminence. But certes you spoke best, for you spoke last, and thanks to poor Bolzanio, (heaven rest his soul), I have a truly classical taste,

and therefore dislike above every thing an *unfinished* discourse; now as it must be clear to all logical minds, that the *last word* is the *finish* of a discourse; so you having had the last word you finished the discourse, *ergo*, you spoke best."

Heedless of the Dwarf's triad, Bianca looked in all directions to try and discover who was likely to have been the prophetic person that had hailed her "*Gran Duchessa di Toscana!*" but ended by saying to herself, "how silly I am to attach any import to these words, which no doubt had their origin in my being a second time mistaken for the Grand Duchess."

On entering the wide court of the prison she paused to admire its beautiful flight of stone steps, and the wall so thickly decorated with armorial bearings carved in stone. As she and her *cortège* entered, a string was lowered with a parcel attached to it from one of the gratings of the upper cells,—when a poor, miserable looking cripple, made a sort of spring forward by an agile evolution of his crutch, and seized the packet; Ghiribizzo, fearing the jailor might perceive the act, good naturedly resolved to make him attend to his own affairs, by animadverting upon his personal appearance which was so far from prepossessing, that it might

have been considered a sufficient punishment for the prisoners to behold it without inflicting on them any other.

“Ha! ha! ha! *Che bel ceffo!*” cried the dwarf, “Ho, Signor Carceriere, for shame! in your *high* station to set such a bad example, truly it is set a thief to catch a thief, for I’ll wager the strongest rope in Tuscany, that you steal all the female prisoners’ hearts.”

The jailor, Durazzo Bembo, looked as if he longed to knock him down for the compliment, but luckily, jailors, are not accustomed to give way to their feelings, so the dwarf retained his perpendicular; while the page on Bianca’s right, handed Bembo the Grand Duke’s order to see the prisoners, and to liberate, whichever three she might think fit objects for clemency. Having perused it, Signor Bembo, bowed down to the ground, and asked her with the amiable smile of *un homme gallant* proposing a party of pleasure, “Whether she would like to see the condemned criminals first?”

“Heavens! no;” replied Bianca with a shudder, “to them I can be of no use, poor wretches.”

“Oh then,” said Bembo, clinking the chains of a pair of fetters, that were slung across his left wrist with the disappointed air of a mercer who

had failed in selling some of his costlier merchandise, "you only want, Eccellenza, to see some of the commoner sort?"

"Precisely so," interposed Ghiribizzo, "we cannot in our limited circumstances, afford any great villains to-day, unless the Grand Duke were with us, to take upon himself all the risks. But what a rare taste you have in jewellery, master jailor," added he, taking one of the fetters in his hand, "with such strong reasons for remaining, the ladies in your Harem would hardly attempt to run away."

The jailor, afraid to transfer his thoughts into words before Bianca, contented himself with rudely jerking the chain out of the dwarf's hand, as he led the way up the wide flight of stone steps. Stopping at the first landing, he selected a huge key from the bunch hanging from his girdle, and unlocked a door which opened into a large flagged room, with a vaulted roof, and double barred windows. The many toned roar of sound that rushed forth on the opening of this door, was perfectly deafening; and Bianca began to repent of her enterprise. A feeling that was not lessened, as she almost succumbed under the overpowering vapour, of the squalled, dirty, closely packed beings before her, but silence having, at her appearance, sud-

denly succeeded to the hoarse din that assailed her ears on entering, she felt it necessary to remain, and fulfil her mission, which she commenced by inquiring of the prisoners, "What they were there for?"

"Nothing at all, but to please the whims of one Signor Francesco de Medici," cried some fifty voices simultaneously. Some few others, said that their wit had brought them there; as they owed their present quarters to having written pasquinades on Bianca Cappello; and though at their wits' end, they were by no means at the end of their wit, as they had written plenty more since their imprisonment.

"Peace! miscreants! who have neither the manners, nor knowledge to know to whom you speak," cried an old woman, "Peace, I say." And she waved with one withered hand a rude black thorn stick, while with the out spread palm of the other she leant against the wall for support, as she hobbled down four steps, leading from an inner room of the common one where the prisoners were assembled.

"Ho! Giovanina Madre del Diavolo!" cried several voices at once, "What wonderful events are you going to foretell now? Don't you remember when Tacopo Bardi was sighing for change of air, you foretold he'd pass the sum-

mer at the Galleys? And so he did. So come let us hear where you mean to send us?"

"To the Devil!" screamed the old woman, "for there's no fear of your missing your way, ye all know it so well." Then suddenly pausing before Bianca, she clasped her hands in a sort of extacy; raised her eyes, and her lips began to move, but for some seconds no sound issued from them. At length she burst out in a shrill yet hollow voice, "Yes, yes! I knew the day *would* come!—the day *has* come!—but this is only the dawn, only the dawn! follow me my bright dream!" added she, beckoning her. "I must speak to you, but not here—not here. It must be alone."

Bianca thinking the hideous apparition before her was a maniac, turned to the jailor, to inquire if it were not so? But before he could answer, the hag rushed between them, and raising her withered right arm, the muscles and veins of which, for a moment, seemed to swell with the strength of a Hercules, as she said, or rather screamed, shaking her clenched hand, "At your peril, Durazzo Bembo, say that I am mad, I am *not* mad! though I have had enough to make me so. But it was not *blood*! that made these eyes red; nor *poison*! that withered and blackened these hands! No, no! I leave

them to those who sit in high places, and are called *great*! that little word, that has been so squandered in all ages, that it may yet be reduced to beggary, and come to kin of mine for shelter. But come, time is precious, bright one," added she, attempting to seize Bianca's hand, while the latter recoiled with horror from her impending touch. "Well, well," continued the hag, "I will not touch your dainty clothes if you don't like it, but I have that to say which you *must* hear; but alone."

"She is quite harmless, Eccellenza," said Bembo in an under tone, "So perhaps you had better give her her way, for she will let you have no peace till you do."

"Come I say," cried Giovanina Neri, stamping her foot (for it was no other than that old lady, whom the reader may remember was the object of Cesare Cinti's dreams by night, and thoughts by day, when Ignatius and Don Manuel stopped at the *Tre Delfini*, in their escape from Venice). "Come I say, for every hour's delay is a life to me."

Re-assured by what the jailor had said, Bianca, not without some slight trepidation, followed the old women up the steps she had previously descended, amid the ribbald laughter of the rabble assembled below. The dwarf at-

tempted also to follow, but when he had reached the last step, the hag very unceremoniously shut the door in his face, and fastened it on the inner side.

No sooner were they alone in this small close room, its whole furniture consisting of a miserable flock bed that stood in one corner, a three-legged wooden stool, and an old broken *scaldine*, the embers in which were quite cold, than the old woman, seating herself on the bed, and pointing to Bianca to take possession of the stool (which the latter however declined), spoke as follows:—

“Who I am, or what I am, is of no import to you to know at present, you will know it all one day, and more too. I was not always the miserable, persecuted wretch that I now am, but because I would *not be* wicked, I have been *called* so, and hunted from place to place, till life has almost been hunted out of me. But not yet, I cannot die yet,” added she, rising and approaching Bianca, as she sunk her voice to a whisper, “for I have much to do, and much to see, before *I* die. And your fate too, all bright, and beautiful, and powerful as you *now* are, depends upon releasing me from this place. More at present I must not, and will not say, though

there is *one* in Florence that knows it all, and has made it all plain to me. And *you!* though I have never out of a dream seen you before, yet I have known and watched for you for years ; *you—that will be Grand Duchess of Tuscany!* but though you will be the Duchess —*I, Giovanina Neri!*” and she almost shrieked the name, “I shall be the ancestress of its future Grand Dukes!—that is,” added she, in a low, muttering, abstracted tone, as if addressing some third but invisible person, “that is if Death, Nature’s inexorable creditor, does not seize on his young life ; but we must baffle Death—ha ! ha ! ha ! that will be rare. First, though, before all else, release me from this prison.”

“First tell me, what was the reason of your being brought to it?” said Bianca, who in spite of herself felt her curiosity excited, and her interest aroused, by the strange incoherent prophecies of the half-crazed being before her.

“I came here for shelter,” replied the old woman. “For years I have been hunted and persecuted as a witch, because I lived on the credulity of others by telling fortunes—and yet I could tell none, because I cared for no fortune but my own ; but after having hidden myself for five years in the mountains beyond Bologna, I returned to Florence, thinking they would

have forgotten me ; but injustice never forgets, and malice never dies—I was recognised, and again hunted—so, to escape from my tormentors, I stole a pair of shoes from a rich merchant, and was sent to prison. But I make money, and tell fortunes all the same ; for twice a week my poor crippled grandson, Giuseppe, brings me the Duke's consultations, and I return the answers."

"But how do you manage that?" asked Bianca, "for I thought they searched every one that came into the prison."

"So they do, every one that comes into the prison, but Giuseppe takes care to remain on the outside of it, and whatever I have for him to take, I let down by a string—ha ! ha ! ha ! how clever the jailors are—aren't they?"

"Well, but when out of prison, where do you live?"

"*Where* I live is no matter. I live with my daughter ; but I know where *you* live, and that will do as well. That is a pleasant cave at the Villa Stiozzi ; many a night have I passed in it, dreaming dreams, and seeing visions, and no one to disturb me ; for no one knows the underground entrance to it but me—and one more."

“And who may that one be?”

“Less than God; and more than man,” replied the old woman, with a frown.

“Well,” said Bianca, with a smile, trying to rally herself out of the uncomfortable feeling she experienced in the presence of her extraordinary companion, “if I obtain your release from prison, will you promise not to steal my shoes?”

“I will promise you,” said the old woman solemnly, “to do that which shall place you in shoes of Joan of Austria! But ask no questions—seek no counsellors—*bide your time!*”

Not knowing well what to reply to this strange promise, and not wishing to prolong the interview, Bianca requested Giovanina to open the door, assuring her that she should be at liberty to leave the prison as soon as she did. The old woman uttered no word of thanks, but darting towards the bed, began collecting some clothes that lay on the outside of it, which she tied in a bundle, saying as she did so—

“That is right—all the better for you; but wait a moment, I have not much to take, but what I have I wont leave.” Having completed her preparations, she approached the door, and laid her hand upon the key, but before she un-

locked it, she turned to Bianca and said, "Now, farewell. We shall meet again when necessary!"

No sooner was the door unlocked, than Bianca descended the steps with much greater alacrity than she had gone up them some minutes before: while the old woman, when she reached the common room, hobbled hastily through the crowd, till she came to the door where Bembo was standing, whom she imperiously commanded to undo the door and let her out.

"Not so fast, dame," said he, "there must be two words to that bargain."

Giovanina made no other reply than by turning angrily round to where Bianca stood, and pointing with one hand to her, and with the other back at the jailor.

"You may let her out," said Bianca, who understood the appeal, "she is one of the three prisoners I have chosen to release, as her offence appears to me trifling." Hearing this, Bembo undid the bars, and when the door was opened the old woman seemed to vanish rather than walk through it, while the prisoners set up a yell, screaming after her,

"Ho, mother! where's your generosity?—where's your gratitude? to leave us without

money to buy pocket handkerchiefs, when you know that we shall cry our eyes out for your departure ; at least leave us enough for a flask of *vino dolce* to drink your health."

Bianca, frightened and disgusted by the hardened bravado of all these people, felt no inclination to let even one of them loose upon the world again ; so turning to Ghiribizzo, and ordering him to distribute some money amongst them, at which they set up a deafening torrent of *vivas*, she prepared to quit this revolting abode of vice and misery, when, as she moved towards the door, she heard a deep, low sigh. Turning round to see from whence it came, she perceived a poor boy sitting on the lower step leading from the room Giovanina had occupied, with his face hid within his hands.

"Poor child !" said Bianca, compassionately, turning back and walking up to him, "don't you see you are in a bad place, and may get trampled upon ?"

"I cannot see—I am blind !" replied the boy, rising, "but I can hear, and I would rather hear than see, if I could always hear such a sweet voice."

"Blind ! how came you blind ?"

"I was born so."

"Have you no parents ?"

“No, they are both dead; but I am afraid they’ll never send for me, and I am so weary of staying in this place, where there is no fresh air, and where I have heard nothing but curses, till I heard you speak.”

“But blind, and so young, how came you to this place?” asked Bianca.

“Oh, I know I was very wicked, very wicked, and that I deserve to be here. But indeed, indeed, I resisted it as long as I could, but at length I was so hungry that I stole some bread, but I begged it first, and the baker would not give it to me; yet I did not get it after all, for I was caught stealing it, and they sent me here.”

“This is the first culprit in this place,” said Bianca, turning to the jailor, as she brushed the tears from her eyes, “who has acknowledged his iniquity, and as none of these other worthies by their own shewing have anything to reproach themselves with, I fear that so flagrant a delinquent remaining amongst them may corrupt their hitherto unimpeachable conduct, so I will even provide for him.”

“Oh! pray, pray, do not take me to a worse place, if worse there be, and I will never, never attempt to steal again,” said the blind boy bursting into tears, and falling on his knees.

“Before I can trust you,” said Bianca, “I

must put you out of temptation, therefore I shall take you home with me, and as you say you like fresh air and sweet sounds, I herewith instal you chamberlain to my birds and flowers, with a salary of a hundred Francesconi a-year, I find your clothes; but the first thing you must do out of your salary, even before you receive it, though I advance you the money, is to go and pay the scrupulous baker, whose nice sense of right and wrong lodged you here, for the bread you did not steal."

"Come, sir chamberlain," said Ghiribizzo, helping the blind boy to rise, "why do you not thank the Signora? By St. Paul, who knew more about prisons than most saints, it is not every day that the cards turn up a hundred Francesconi a-year, and one's debts paid without asking—out with thy thanks, I say."

"I cannot thank her," sobbed the boy, "I feel dumb as well as blind; but I hear all my heart is saying, and I will tell it to her by and bye."

"Tell me your name now," said Bianca, "and never mind the rest."

"Ugolina Haredia," replied the boy.

"Rise then, Ugolina, and one of my people shall conduct you to your future home." And ordering the dwarf to recompense Bembo for

his trouble in showing them the prison, the next minute saw her beyond its wall.

"Surely, it can't be!—Yes, by Saint Giv-nought (if there be such a saint, and of course there is, for misers must have their saints as well as other people) it is though, the very same blind boy to whom the Signor Sylvestro was once upon a time so generous in bestowing hard names and advice," said Ghiribizzo, looking full in Ugolino's face, as soon as they were in the open air.

"Oh! how pleasant this nice fresh air is," said the boy, as he took the *lacchés* hand that was to conduct him to the Villa Stiozzi.

"Ah my good fellow, pleasanter to you than to most of us, for we *see* that the sun is setting, while you can only feel that it is rising, having stepped out of prison into the office of chamberlain to my lords the birds and the flowers," said the dwarf.

"Where to, Eccellenza?" asked the first page.

"I would go to Diaspro, the jeweller's, on the Ponte Vecchio," said Bianca.

"Ponte Vecchio," echoed the page, giving the order of march, and the procession proceeded.

Bianca's thoughts were busy with the hideous

apparition and strange prophecies of Giovanna Neri, which latter she could not help coupling with the words "*Gran Duchessa di Toscana!*" which had greeted her on entering the prison, though those words had certainly not been uttered by the voice of the old woman. "*I will promise to do that which shall put you in the place of Joan of Austria,*" said Bianca, mechanically recalling the Sibyl's words, "yet Joan of Austria is young and of fair health," added she, commenting inwardly upon the beldam's text. And then a shudder came over her, as she thought of the means generally resorted to in those days for removing obstacles, and silencing complaints; and she added aloud, as she passed her hand over her eyes,

"No, no; not a murderess too!"

"Did you speak, *Excellenza?*" asked the page on her right.

"I only asked," said Bianca, colouring, "if we were far from Diaspro's, for I feel tired."

"No Signora; another moment we shall be in the *Mercato Nuovo*, and so, close by the bridge."

Bianca, who had hurried over her orders to the jeweller, felt all the magic influence of the hour, as she reached the open space beyond the

shops, on the Ponte Vecchio, and beheld the glories of the setting sun. The loud noises of the busy day had given place to the gentle hum of the myriad world of insects that people the evening air, and a holy stillness reigned around. But suddenly the calm was broken by the trampling of a large mob, coming from the Piazza Santa Felicita, and shouting,

“Viva il Gran Duca! viva la Gran Duchessa!”

At which cries, Bianca's people drew up to one side of the bridge, for it was, in fact, the Duke and Duchess, with their court, coming from the Pitti. Francesco, as in duty bound in public, walked beside his wife under the canopy, but seemed to be in a particularly sociable mood as he addressed all his conversation to the courtiers around him, the principal ones being, the Marchese Sinori, Conte Vlissee, Cavaliero Aldello Placidi, Cavaliero Bissoli, Silvio Piccolomini, Cesare Pappagalli, Il Cavaliero di Monaco, Bettini Ricosali, Ugo Caliaro, Conte Germanico, Federigo Sanorniano, and a court parasite of the name of Raffaello Gualterotti, who was compensating, to the best of his ability, by the most unblushing flattery, the Intendant Bonaventuri, for his temporary separation from the Contessa Ricci, who was walking on the other side, by the Grand Duchess, with the

wives and daughters of the above named cavaliers, and Donna Maraquita della Torre, who was one of the ladies of the bedchamber.

Of all this gorgeous pageant, with its rabble accompaniment, Bianca saw but two individuals, her husband and his mistress. 'And it was for *that*,' thought she, looking bitterly at the Contessa Ricci, with whom time had dealt very hardly in four years, 'and it was for *that* that I was goaded into becoming the thing I am!' Bonaventuri perceived her, and kissed his hand; Bianca turned indignantly away: as she did so, she perceived a flower girl forcing her way through the mob, and presenting the Grand Duchess with a bunch of moss-roses. Joan received them graciously and gracefully enough, and, turning to the Duke, offered him one; but he, pointing to a sprig of myrtle that already occupied his vest, declined it. The circumstance was trifling in itself, and almost unobserved by the bystanders; but trifling as it was to them, it formed one of those memorable epochs of *internal* life, both to the wife whose courtesy was rejected, and the mistress whose gift had been treasured and retained. Cold and passionless as was Joan's external bearing, a close observer might have detected a solitary tear upon her pale unruffled cheek,

which had burst the prison-bounds of her ever-fettered feelings too far to be recalled, and which found its way at least to one heart, *the one which had most injured her!* At that moment, the beautiful, the brilliant, the idolized, the triumphant Bianca Cappello, would have given the world to have changed places with the plain, the mediocre, the unloved, and the neglected Joan of Austria—in short, to have been the shedder of that *one tear!* True, she had grief enough to shed a thousand; but she wanted the virtue to have hallowed *one!*—and she felt it.

As the royal *cortége* advanced nearer to that of Bianca, whose dazzling beauty and gorgeous dress, as she stood beneath the crimson rays of the setting sun, threw the homely plainness of the Grand Duchess more than ever into the shade. Francesco for the first time perceived her, and half uttered an involuntary exclamation of delight, while the Duchess, purposely looking straight before her, was about to pass on, when the Duke setting the example, the whole procession stopped, and turning to Joan, with as much anger in his looks as court etiquette, and the publicity of the place would allow, he said—

“Your Highness does not remember the Signora Bianca?”

“But too well,” was the Duchess’ veracious, but impolitic reply.

“’Twere but courteous then, as your memory has not forsaken you,” said Francesco tartly, “to express a wish to see one at Court, who graces it so much, and has absented herself too long.”

“Your Highness’ wishes are commands,” rejoined Joan, haughtily, “and I am sure you have but to issue them, for the Signora to obey them; for ourselves, we have none——but your will.”

“You hear, Signora,” said the Duke, turning to Bianca, “the Duchess wishes your attendance at Court.”

[“’Twere best paid at a distance, methinks,” whispered the Cavaliero di Monaco to Silvio Piccolomini.]

[“I am of your mind,” rejoined the latter, “but the Duke seems determined that the only distance should be on the side of the Duchess.”]

Bianca merely bowed to Francesco’s speech, for she felt that she could have made no answer that would not have been an insult to Joan;

the Duchess appreciated the motive of her silence, and showed that she did so by her farewell salutation as she walked on, which was a shade less haughty, and half a shade less cold than her greeting had been.

As the Duchess moved on, the courtiers lagged behind, and then bowed down to the very ground to Bianca, who was evidently the reigning power to them. Indeed there were but two pair of eyes in the whole crowd, that threw upon her a look of virtuous and reproachful horror as she passed; one look was from the twin stars of radiant darkness belonging to Donna Maraquita della Torre—the other from the drab-coloured orbs of the Signora Sylvestro, as she stood in the thick of the rabble, fanning herself vehemently, and surrounded by all the little elegancies of life, in the shape of *terra cotta scaldinis*, and other domestic vases, which she seemed to think “more honoured in the breach than the observance,” for not perceiving them (numerous as they were) in her anxiety to remark, in Bianca’s hearing, to a mercer’s daughter, who had been a caprice of the Grand Duke’s, “*How* unhappy the poor Grand Duchess looked! That woman must indeed be a monster, who could estrange a husband’s affections from such a dear, sweet, bright, an-

gelic creature!"—her foot slipped, and she fell, amid a crash like that of a falling world, in the midst of this colony of pans and pitchers, the yells of the mob, and the exorbitant vociferations for indemnity from the merchant to whom the ruined crockery belonged.

* * * * *

Sad amid mirth, disappointed amid success, jealous amid apathy, and humbled to the dust in the midst of triumph, Bianca returned to her splendid yet desolate home, weary in body and spirit.

"Let no dead person make a voyage with the living," warned the ancients, *"even their ashes stir up the billows, and threaten the living with storms."* And let none but the irreproachable and the happy, if such on earth there be, *look back*—for memory is a sarcophagus that contains but the ashes of the past, and fitful indeed are the storms it stirs up for the living!

CHAPTER X.

" ——— But man is higher than his place : he looks upward and uncloses the wings of his soul ; and when the sixty minutes, which we call sixty years, have finished striking, he arises and kindles, whilst he mounts, and the ashes of his plumage fall back, and the unveiled soul arises alone, without earth, and as pure as a strain on high."—THE DEATH OF AN ANGEL, BY JEAN PAUL FRIEDRICH RICHTER ; TRANSLATED BY A. KENNEY.

THE last muffled tone of the great bell of San Marc's had died away, there was a partial stillness in Venice, for one of her nobles had just been conveyed to his last home. Count Cappello was no more ! His evening sun had long lain coldly in lengthening shadows on the earth, for of all mortal maladies a broken heart is the most lingering. Is it that Death likes not damaged wares, and leaves them till Nature forces them upon him ? or is it that,

deprived of all that stirs it with joy or hope, life stagnates into a prolonged space? Who knows? For there is a veil over the mysteries of life and death, which the Eternal only can raise. But life has many mysteries; death has but two, its mystery of time, and its mystery of tears; for even where no love has been, the warm life that it takes, and the cold and voiceless vacuum it leaves, make the eyes moist and the heart dry; for human grief, any more than human love, is not the growth of human will.

The old Count was no more, and silent were the splendid halls of his proud palace; even the *chef-d'œuvres* of art which he had taken such delight in collecting, seemed to mourn in their mute manner for him who had convoked them; for black velvet hangings were drawn over their glowing tints, while Titian, with tearful eyes and a sort of parental feeling, superintended the donning of these sables.

Elena Cappello sat calm and rigid, with her breviary in her hand. It was not grief that she felt, it was stupor; she endured no pain, but she experienced a loss, and it seemed as if that loss was a part of herself, that had been removed in some unaccountable manner. Her brother, the Patriarch, sat on the other side of the table

covered with papers, that was between them ; a quiet, melancholy smile, played like a phosphoric gleam over his countenance, as raising his head, which drooped more than ever over his right shoulder, he said to his sister,

“ Come rouse thee, Elena, I am far on my way to meet your husband in a better world, but we must not neglect his business in this. He who is to succeed him,” added Grimani, with a sigh, “ I fear will never replace him ; my mind misgives me, but he is after no good in France, from some angry words the Marquis de Millepropos let fall, when last week he received his sudden recall, with an order for the Sieur Colbert to fill his place, till his successor arrived. Still Vittorio must be written to, and the poor girl,” said the Patriarch, affectionately taking Elena’s hand, and pressing it between both of his, “ methinks, sister mine, ’twere a poor spite to withhold from Bianca the sorrow of her father’s death.”

“ Then let the upholder, or her husband’s master, Salviati, communicate it to her,” replied she, drily, and returning with renewed attention to her book.

“ Nay, nay, sister, this is not well ; have mercy on the living daughter, for the dead father’s sake.”

“She had no mercy upon *him*,” said Elena, bursting into the first tears she had shed since her husband’s death.

“The more reason to show mercy to her, for the more bitter must be her repentance,” replied the Patriarch; “besides,” added he, endeavouring to touch the strongest chord in his sister’s composition—pride, “her husband has risen in the world since his marriage; he is now Intendant to the Grand Duke, and in high favour at court.”

“Thank you, through his wife’s dishonour!” retorted Elena, sharply, “go to, ’tis not for a Christian prelate to boast of such advancement.”

“You are right, dear Elena, and I bow to your reproof. But sister, sister! what is life? To-day a green meadow, filled with sunshine and fresh flowers. And to-morrow—Nay!—And what is this world’s greatness?—A bubble, blown by fate for the sport of time; which as it increases, is ever nearer bursting! And what is power?—Look round these gorgeous but now deserted halls, and let their silence answer you,—*An Echo! and no more*. But there is another brighter, better, and above all *unperishable* world; whose fashion passeth not away, and to whose king we send up daily

ambassadors, in our prayers. But what is the express stipulation of their patent? That we forgive others as we hope to be forgiven. And have we not all sinned more against our Heavenly Father, than this poor misguided child has against her earthly one."

"I will try then, and forgive her," sobbed Elena, "but—but—I cannot write to her."

"I will, if you will authorize me to do so, Eccellenza, for I have been in the habit of writing to the Signora," said Titian, who now entered the gallery, having completed his task of superintending the covering of the pictures.

"As you please, Signor Titian; use your own discretion, provided you don't compromise mine," said Elena coldly.

And with this extorted and limited permission, the artist commenced his work of kindness. He began his letter by saying that he wrote it at Elena's desire, the sad event, it was intended to announce he told as briefly and simply as possible, for to use his own expression, whenever he had bad tidings to communicate, he made it a rule to foreshorten them as much as possible; while anything pleasant, he brought out, and gave it as much life as he could; for which reason he now dwelt long upon the kind manner in which the old Count

had spoken for the first and last time of his daughter, a few days before he died, and he ended by saying he hoped to see her in Florence in the spring. Nor was he a little glad, to have to add as a postscript, that the Patriarch desired to be commended to her, which he did in an under voice lest Elena should hear him.

During the year that Vittorio Cappello had been in France, he had passed his time between the Château de Quillac, using ineffectual threats to frighten and subdue Arianna, and the even then gay Metropolis; gay amid its fanatical butcheries, and its desecrating civil wars; but it was not such men as the Chancellor de L'Hôpital, the philosophical Michel Montagne, or the elegant and benevolent Amiot, that attracted him to Paris. The dissolute court of Catherine de Medici (for it could hardly be called that of Charles the Ninth), and the wit, convivial disposition and total want of principle of the Maréchal de Retz, being far more congenial to him, as if the nobles had not sufficient brutality in the constant and daily increasing massacres of the Calvinists; which at length swelled into the horrible atrocities of the St. Bartholomew. Some Spanish Hidalgos, accredited employés of Philip of Spain, had

lately introduced the refined and delightful amusement of a bull fight. It was after one of these exhibitions at which the whole court had assisted; and where Vittorio perceived even without the aid of his vanity, that he had made himself very agreeable to the beautiful widow, the young Queen of Scots, who had promised him her hand for the first *la volta* at a fête given after the barbarities of the day, by the young Duc de la Trémoille; that his page informed him that two heralds demanded an audience with him, one from Florence wearing the Medici livery, the other from Venice in a suit of sables bearing his escutcheon.

Making a courteous apology to his royal *Inamorata*, he hurried out to receive at the same time, Martin Bernardini's challenge, and the news of his father's death; but the latter seemed to produce less impression on him than the former, for adding the two pieces of intelligence together, all he said in reference to his loss was, "Well, I suppose it is destined that I should succeed him in all things, even the tomb of the Cappellos!" While, after reading and re-reading Martin Bernardini's challenge, he exclaimed, "*Ventre sans gris*," as the King of Navarre says. So after all, the story of Arianna's being

the Gonfaloniere's niece is true ! Well, so much the better for her, for *perhaps* I may marry her."

Count Cappello, was too gallant to break an appointment with a lady, much less a Queen ; so that night no one danced so gaily, looked so animated, or talked so wittily (when he did not talk tenderly) to his royal partner, as did the Count Vittoria, at the Hôtel de la Trémoille. And no one in Paris knew of the old Count's death, till the next morning, when his handsome Heir appeared earlier than usual at the Louvre in a full suit of sables, to make his respectful *adieu* to the Queen Mother ; to bestow *bon-bons*, and benedictions, on the young King ; to place in the treacherous hand of De Retz an equally treacherous one ; and to imprint, in the presence, a kiss on the fair hand of Mary Stuart, previous to his quitting Paris, for the home of his fathers.

BIANCA CAPPELLO.

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

BY

LADY LYTTON BULWER,

AUTHOR OF "CHEVELEY."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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BIANCA CAPPELLO.

CHAPTER I.

**"How wisdom and folly meet, mix, and unite,
How virtue and vice blend their black and their white."**

BURNS.

**"His humour is lofty, his discourse peremptory—
His tongue filed, his eye ambitious, his gait majestical,
And his general behaviour vain, ridiculous,
And thrasonical."—SHAKESPEARE.**

It was a fine autumnal morning, at about half past ten o'clock, when Ignatius Dragoni was wending his way to the Louvre, through the dark, narrow, and withal dirty, Rue de Pavia, Rue du Pomme d'Or, and Rue Colbert, with their wooden-beamed, red-tiled, and gable-end houses, rendered still more uncouth by the excrescence of a low shop projecting from each ; which, shut up nightly within a wooden cover, and fastened with an iron chain and padlock,

gave to Old Paris a very different appearance, to the lofty elegance of the present façades and colonades, and its balmy Tuilleries gardens, counteracting, with their fragrant toilette of sweet flowers, in some slight degree, the pestilential vapours of the streets. Still, even in those days, the Parisians, within a walk of their dark streets, had their 'guingettes,' their lemonade, and their laugh; and if a grisette's pointed hat appeared in the wooden balcony, or her foot on the external flight of wooden stairs, of her house, the one was sure to have a smarter ribbon, and the other to be better shod, than were the ladies of the landed squires at the other side of the channel. The massacre of the Calvinists was a matter of too ordinary occurrence, to interrupt either the business or the amusements of the Parisians, and the tumult that could succeed in bringing them to their windows, which had only the shedding of Protestant blood for its origin, was sure to see them turn away again in the same instant with a disappointed exclamation of—'Oh ce n'est que des Huguenots!'—It is only some Huguenots!—while to see the 'coche' of the queen-mother, or of the Duchesse de Valentinois, (much less to see both together, as sometimes happened when they met in a narrow street, and one was obliged to give way

to the other, by backing out to let the rival equipage pass), was sure to convoke a marveling crowd, that did not disperse under half an hour. It was through one of these crowds that the Jesuit was now making his way,—having got on the steps of a house to avoid being splashed by the lumbering vehicle of Diana of Poitiers, which had just passed, and left every door-way and window full, gazing after its ponderous splendours! Though it was more than a year since he had been attacked, and his arm broken, on his way from Belri-guardo, by Vittorio Cappello's men, yet Ignatius thought his complaint and appeal for an order to search the Château de Luillac would have a better effect with the aid of a sling than without, therefore he still retained it, and was in the act of saving the arm that it bore from the contact of a horse's head, when he looked up and perceived the Marquis de Millepropos, who was himself riding to court, to resign the patents of his appointment as ambassador at Venice. There was in the splendour of the Marquis's dress to the full as much of the foppery of a lover as the gorgeousness of a courtier, and as he passed, the air became redolent of 'rose musquée,' from the perfumed gloves with which he caressed his beard, and the brodered kerchief with which he kept

warding off the common flies and the common air. He now turned round, and desired his equerry to ride forward, and await him at the gate of the Louvre ; after which, he reined in his horse, and drew up under a wooden balcony, from which was suspended the sign of a gilt embroidery frame, while within it appeared the following affiche :—

“ Fanchette Blondelle, Brodeuse en or et en soie ; Brèveté de sa Majesté la Reine Mère, et la Reine d'Ecosse.”

“ Ho ! demoiselle Fanchette,” said the Marquis, looking up, “ Is my suit finished yet ? ”

“ It would appear not, or even taken into consideration,” chuckled a young shoemaker, the humble, but at the same time successful, rival of the Marquis, as he sat finishing a pair of holiday slippers for this said demoiselle Fanchette before his own shop door ; the heels of which ‘ pantoufles ’ were, at least, half an inch higher than any other heels in Paris, not excepting the queen-mother’s.

“ Demoiselle Fanchette,” re-echoed the Marquis, “ have you nothing for me ? ”

At this second appeal, an upper lattice opened, and a dimpled red mouth, with a very ‘ espiègle ’ pair of laughing dark eyes, appeared at it ; while the hand belonging to these lips and eyes held a vase of faded flowers ; and

taking a deliberate and too unerring aim, this wicked little hand hurled the whole of the unfragrant contents of the vase at the head of the devoted Marquis; and then, seeking its companion, they began wringing themselves in apparent despair, as she exclaimed,

“ ‘Oh mille pardons, Monsieur le Marquis,’ I really did not see you.”

“ ‘Ah sacré mille pestes,’ ” cried the Marquis, removing his hat, and vehemently shaking the unwelcome bouquet from him. “And you,” continued he, espying Ignatius, who stood directly under the window, “you have not got one of them!”—and his looks said as plainly as any words could have done, it would have been some consolation if you had.

“Non, Seigneur,” said the Jesuit, with a sly smile, bowing to the Marquis’s youthful dress, “fortune, like other women, favours only the young!” (Ignatius was at least ten years younger than the Marquis.)

“ ‘Morbleu ! mon père, vous avez raison ; mais cela me coute toujours une toilette,’ ” said the Marquis de Millepropos, turning his horse’s head towards his own hôtel, and casting a mingled look of reproach and expostulation at Demoiselle Fanchette, who still stood at the window, bending the empty flower vase down in the direction of the ill-fated marquis ; while

between herself and Etienne Pérault, the before-mentioned young shoemaker, there was carrying on a very brisk correspondence, 'via' (what Mr. Bob Fudge, in our own times, has so appropriately designated "*the two-penny post of the eyes*.") Ignatius had known quite enough of the Marquis de Millepropos' amatory misadventures at Venice, not to smile at the species of fortune that still seemed to attend him ; though his untiring and undaunted perseverance would have done honour to a better cause, while in that of the mischievous little deity, at whose shrine he persisted in worshipping, it only made him ridiculous.

As the Jesuit was about to turn out of the rue Colbert, and cross the then rude wooden bridge leading to the Louvre, his ears were assailed with loud cries of "Down with the Heretic !" and missiles, including stones, and other hard substances, flew in all directions. In turning to discover the object of the mob's vengeance, Ignatius perceived Théodore de Bèze, (better known by his Latinized name of Beza), one of the early disciples of Calvin, with whom the Cardinal de Lorraine had had a controversy some three years before, in what the French then termed "The famous Colloquy of Poissi," at the time when Catherine de Medici, with a faint show of justice, had pro-

posed public controversies as a medium through which the Papal and Calvinistic factions might settle their differences, either by forsaking or reconciling their hostile tenets. But as, unfortunately for himself, Théodore de Bèze was considered, in public opinion, to have had the best of it in the 'Poissi' dispute with the Cardinal, Lainez the general of the Jesuits never forgave him, and always had a sufficient number of his emissaries in the streets of every town in France, to raise a hue and cry after the reformer wherever and whenever he appeared. Upon the morning in question, De Bèze seemed doubly obnoxious,—for the "head and front of his offence" was with him, as he carried in his hand the unmutilated Book of God,—having been to read prayers to a dying cousin of the Admiral de Coligni, who had been content to forfeit her earthly possessions (in support of her newly embraced faith) to the same treachery which afterwards betrayed her illustrious cousin, and his equally illustrious friend, the Prince de Condé, when they were guilty of the weakness of believing in the fair promises of Catherine de Medici. Théodore de Bèze was a mild, middle-aged looking man, devoid of every species of *charlatanism*, even the most subtle, because the most infectious of all,—that of enthusiasm. He seemed indeed to

hold himself wholly and solely as a follower of "One, whose shoe latchet he was not worthy to loosen;" and if *his* words, when he preached them, with their divine eloquence of *truth*, failed to convince, he had not the presumption to suppose that the verbiage of human sophistry could succeed.

"Good friends," said De Bèze, warding off, without, at the same time, making any great effort to do so, the missiles that were assailing him, "Say, that you trample my body to atoms, what good will it do you? and what harm will it do me? On the contrary, all the loss will be yours, and all the gain mine: for you seem to take a pleasure in hooting and pelting me, and that pleasure you will assuredly lose, when you lose me. Whereas, when I go hence, I shall see God, and see you no more."

"Hear how he talks!" shouted one of the mob; and the words were immediately echoed by the rest,—*"Hear how he talks! A heretic see God!"*

"And why not *his* God, Maître Laurent?" hiccupped a drunken publican, "the devil is the God of the Huguenots; true, I assure you, the Archbishop told us so last Sunday."

Ignatius, whose bigotry was only political, and to whom the Catholic religion was synonymous with the power of Spain, and the order

of Loyola *one* with the advancement of Ignatius Dragoni, admired, in spite of himself, the mild dignity of the Calvinist, and, turning to the mob, as he protectingly laid his hand on Théodore's arm, he addressed them in his behalf.

“Ho, Father! you a Jesuit, and take part with a Calvinist; ‘fi donc!’ Know you not that your General says they are all monkeys, monsters, and foxes? and are such fit to be let loose?”

“I do not want to let them loose,” replied Ignatius, “on the contrary, I am going to the Louvre, and would take this man with me, to learn the royal pleasure concerning him; but I object to all street brawls and violence, for they are things which do the cause of our holy religion so much harm.”

“A fine doctrine, truly,” shrugged Maître Laurent, who appeared the orator among the mob; “I suppose we shall be told next that it injures our health to burn faggots in our hearths; and how pray are we to warm our public squares without a few heretics to make a blaze? a man's hearth is but a private matter after all; but the flame in the ‘Carfour’ is for the public good, and, ‘Vogue la galère!’ it must not want fuel.”

“‘Vive Maître Laurent!’ he speaks reason!” shouted the mob.

“Come, come,” cried Ignatius, throwing a few gold pieces among the rabble, which produced more effect upon them than even Maître Laurent’s orthodox eloquence; although that worthy now stood with his bare arms resolutely folded, and his blue woollen Dacian-shaped cap, placed on one side with an air of defiance.

“Come, come! I am no heretic or partizan of heretics, as this dress of my sacred order may attest” (and here he crossed himself devoutly); “but let the law mete out its own penalties; it better behoves peaceable citizens, and good Catholics, to pray for the souls of the deluded, than to pelt their bodies; or even to drain a wine-flask in drinking better sense to them.”

“The good father is right,” now vociferated public opinion, as that disinterested and impartial organ scrambled for the Jesuit’s gold, which having found, they determined to pay him the compliment of adopting the latter part of his advice, by repairing to a neighbouring wine-shop, and there drinking to the conversion of the Calvinist. Maître Laurent alone stood his ground, and budged not; but even he could not resist the voice of friendship, as it said to him, with an accompanying nudge, ‘Allons boire’—let us go drink!

The narrow street was soon cleared, except of its ordinary passengers; and Théodore de Bèze turned to Ignatius, and thanked him for his assistance.

“And now,” added he, with a faint smile, “I would offer you my hand, but that to be seen on such friendly terms with a Calvinist, might bring upon you the suspicion of the Inquisition; and to be suspected in this world is far more dangerous than to be guilty. So now farewell, for should Lainez be at the Louvre, as most probably he will, his displeasure might not stop at words when he saw you so accompanied.”

“Nay,” said Ignatius, “our General’s zeal may be hot, that I do not deny; but you must not believe all the calumnies of the rabble, for that many-headed monster the mob, in seeking to adorn, generally disfigures its idols; and I am sure had Lainez been in my place this morning he would have acted as I did.”

De Bèze shook his head, with an incredulous smile; and the Jesuit continued:—

“Besides, I do not consider that you are in safety unless by accompanying me to the Louvre, whither I am obliged to go, you have me for an escort.”

“Well, then, to the Louvre be it,” said the Calvinist; “I fear to meet no man; though

for your protection I accept it as frankly as it is offered."

"And yet," pursued Ignatius, in answer to his own thoughts, as he drew from his bosom the splendidly illuminated copy of Maximus Theophilus's edition of the Bible, which he had brought as a present to Catherine de Medici, "I verily believe the Queen mother does not set one whit more value upon this volume, than on the one you hold in your hand; for she is accused of being too tolerant to those of your persuasion."

"I believe also," replied Théodore de Bèze, with a faintly contemptuous smile, "that she has no prejudices either way; astrology being her only creed, inasmuch as that in it she places her whole trust."*

* The astrological mania that Catherine de Medici brought with her from Florence, infected the court of France for four succeeding reigns. Even the enlightened historian De Thou, shared in this superstition. Henry the Fourth of France had his son's horoscope drawn. The court of Mary de Medicis was filled with impostors, pretending to the art of divination; and at the disgraceful trial of Galigai Coucini, in the reign of Louis the Thirteenth, when she was asked by the Judge with what sorceries she had succeeded in subjugating the mind of the Queen mother, she replied, "De l'ascendant qu'un esprit supérieur a toujours sur un esprit foible;" but she was burnt nevertheless.

The Jesuit relapsed into silence, in which they both continued till they reached the Louvre, where, among divers gaily dressed pages, and well-mounted equerries, sat the Marquis de Millepropos's squire, finishing the second nap he had indulged in that morning while waiting for his master.

"How is this," said Ignatius; "here are two staircases, one opposite the other, only there are no guards before this one on the left, and I do not know which we ought to go up, never having been here before."

"This way, this way, to the right, 'mon père,'" said a court page. "Those were the stairs leading to the Queen Mary Stuart's apartments; but since she has gone to England, they have been shut up, and no guards are kept at the door."

The Jesuit thanked the boy, and with his companion ascended the wide staircase before them, on each landing of which were four men in armour; but in the first ante-room was a guard, composed of about a hundred nobles, (like the Guardia Nobile at Florence). Their dress consisted of bright steel armour, with gold rivets, over which they wore a tunic of scarlet velvet. The plumes of their helmets (which were also of polished steel) were snow white, but fastened at the base, with small scarlet

ones disposed in the form of a fleur-de-lys.* Passing through this ante-room, they reached another, where a sort of band, or more properly speaking, orchestra, were playing several of the monotonous pieces of the time, when the science of music was in its infancy, and consequently its sounds were shrill, feeble, and discordant. Before an organ, sat, with up-turned sightless eyes, the most celebrated 'maestro' (next to Palestrina) of the sixteenth century, a Spaniard by birth, and Francesco Salinas† by name. Near him stood wrapt, in a kind of breathless attention, a youth of about fifteen, François Eustache du Caurroy, whom his contemporaries afterwards styled "le Prince des

* Red lilies are the city arms of Florence.

† Salinas was a native of Burgos, and having been born blind, his attention was directed to music by his parents. By an Andulasian lady, whom he taught to play on the organ, he was instructed in Latin, and became so enamoured of its literature, that he was sent to Salamanca, where he acquired a knowledge of Greek literature and philosophy. Here he was introduced to Peter Sarmentus, Archbishop of Compostella, who took him under his protection. Many years after this, after having made his name celebrated at most continental courts, he was appointed professor of music at his own university. In the "History of Music," he is cited as an admirable performer on the organ, and as better acquainted with the science of music, and the works of his predecessors, than any other person of his day.

Professeurs de Musique," and who, even at that early age, considering the backwardness of the science itself, evinced singular proficiency. The rest of the orchestra was composed of viol de gambas, sackbuts, virginals, and citherns, played by those (then) celebrated Netherland professors, les Sieurs Gombert, Jacket Berghem, Clemens non Papa, Cipriano de Rore, Orlando di Lasso, and Josquin des Prés.* Ignatius waited for a pause in the music, and then as he passed him, placed his hand upon Salinas's shoulder.

"Speak," said the latter in a mild voice, "that I may know thee, for my ears have many acquaintances—my eyes, alas! none."

"Nay, Master Francis, you send such sweet friends to the ears of others, that 'tis but fair yours should have many in return."

"Ha! Father Ignatius," cried Salinas, rising

* Adami calls the grandfather of this Des Prés, "Uomo insigne per l'inventionne." He was 'Maestro di Capello' to Louis the Twelfth of France, and was promised a benefice by that monarch. The promise was, however, forgotten; but Josquin being commanded to compose a motett for the chapel royal, chose this verse from the 119th Psalm, "Memor esto verbi tui servo tuo." The music was much admired, and brought the promised gift; after which he composed a song of thanksgiving from the words, "Bonitatem fecisti cum servo tuo, Domine."

and clasping the Jesuit's hand in both of his—
“ what news from Spain, good friend ? How fares it with the king ? ”

“ Well,—at least so herald his own letters, for it is some time since I have been at Madrid.”

“ Then, perchance, you may not have heard of his gracious present to me ? A new organ, the finest that ever echoed to human touch ;—but heaven only knows,” added the poor musician with a sigh, “ whether I shall live to play on it before him ; for I have felt ill of late, and 'tis but a churlish climate after ours, this France, though the natives do call it ‘ La belle France,’ and say that the young Queen of Scots shed a sea of tears to leave.”

“ Cheer up, Master Francis, and keep thine organ in good humour, to glad Philip's ears, one little month from this, when he comes to Bayonne with his queen, to meet her royal brother of France,” said Ignatius.

“ Indeed ! Well, that is a goodly hearing ; but to think that I should have spoken to you for five minutes, and not yet felicitated you on your brave rescue of Don Manuel, at Venice ! Nothing else was talked of at Madrid for a month ? and the King gave a banquet in honour of it. 'Fore Jove, but those Venetians must owe you a grudge ! ”

“On the contrary,” replied the Jesuit, drily, “it is I who am still in their debt; but I am an honest man, as you know, Master Francis, and if it please heaven to spare my life, they shall be paid.”

Salinas was about to reply, when a scuffle at the door attracted every one’s attention.

“Indeed, Monsieur le Marquis, what you ask is impossible,” said one of the pages. “Were it the Cardinal de Lorraine, or the Duc de Guise himself, I have her Majesty’s orders that no one be admitted to the *entrée* to-day till her conference be ended with a signor who arrived last night from Florence.”

“Refuse *me!* a man of *my* rank, the *entrées!*” cried the Marquis de Millepropos, breaking from the page, and fanning himself vehemently with his pocket handkerchief as he entered the room,—“and then, the ignorant jackanapes, to place *me* below the Lorraines and Guises! I’d have you to know, sirrah, that the Millepropos have always been the foremost family in France—especially in politics. Beside, rascal! I am an ambassador!—his Majesty’s representative!—an ambassador!—an ambassador! an ambassador! Do you understand that, varlet?”

“I perfectly understand that you *were* an ambassador,” replied the page with the most

provoking ‘sang froid,’ and a still more provoking smile, “but I believe it is precisely to resign that office that Monsieur le Marquis now presents himself at the Louvre?”

“Insolent!” muttered the Marquis,—now fanning himself with the frail tenure of his glory, the identical letters patent he was so soon about to lay at the feet of the King.—“My family—but every one in France knows the Millepropos! What were France without them? Mine is truly noblesse! And pray,” continued the Marquis de Millepropos, clenching his hand at the page with what he conceived to be an air of calm dignity, “how long is this signor from Florence, as you call him, to be with her Majesty?”

“That is more than any one can tell; but the Sieur Amiot, who saw him enter, and who it appears knows him, said, he was a very distinguished personage, and a great astrologer; so that you may thank your stars if the conference ends these two hours.

“Ah, those cursed astrologers!” exclaimed the Marquis, “no doubt it is they who have poisoned the queen’s mind against me,—and yet,” added he, arranging his ruff, caressing his chin, and raising himself on the points of his feet, “I have always been true to my country; for, remembering that Catherine de Medici was

great as a queen, I never allowed myself to be seduced into taking advantage of any weakness she may have betrayed as a woman ; and yet I am no longer in favour ! ‘ Parbleu ! Voilà peut-être le pourquoi ! ’ ”

The titter which this speech of the Marquis had given rise to had scarcely subsided, when the door leading to the presence chamber opened : a chamberlain announced, that all those awaiting an audience in the ante-room might pass on ; and, as he did so, a man, of a tall and dignified bearing, dressed in black velvet, and bowing graciously to the right and to the left, walked through, and made his exit at the outer door. It seemed to Ignatius, as he gazed after him, that he had seen him before,—but he had not time to recollect where, when he was hurried on with the crowd to the presence chamber, having only time to say to Salinas, “ Master Francis, you must dine with me to-day, at this far-famed ordinary that I have heard so much of, the ‘ Champ du drap d’or.’ So await my coming, and I will shorten the time as much as possible.”

CHAPTER II.

“ Like a fine bragging youth : and tell quaint lies
 How honourable ladies sought my love,
 Which I denying, they fell sick and died.”

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

“ The King leans from his chamber, from his balcony on high,
 What means this furious clamour my palace porch so nigh?”

LOCKHART'S SPANISH BALLADS.

WHEN the Jesuit and Théodore de Bèze, together with the Marquis de Millepropas, and others who had been waiting in the ante-room, reached the presence chamber, they found the young King; his preceptor, Amiot; Michel de l'Hôpital, the virtuous chancellor, as he was deservedly called; the Maréchal de Retz; the Cardinal de Châtillon (whose Calvinistic tenets had been too openly avowed in the preceding reign, to gain him more than an ungracious toleration at the present court); Henri le Balafré, and other officers of state, and members of the royal household; but the queen mother had not yet appeared. The

throne room was a large, lofty apartment, with a music gallery running round it, supported by pillars of white Carrara marble, with richly gilt Corinthian capitals;—the arabesque iron railing of the gallery was also gilt. The walls were hung with gold arras, and ornamented with a profusion of the rarest and most costly armour, comprising gold and silver shields, greaves, and helmets, the cunning and unrivalled handicraft of Benvenuto Cellini, which had been left there since the time of Francis the First. More civilized France had even then her inlaid, though unpolished, oak floors, which were much pleasanter to walk upon than either the marble ones of Italy, or the rush-strewed ones of England. The throne was situated at the upper end of the room, on a dais of three steps, covered with violet-coloured velvet, fringed with gold; on the upper step, or landing of which, were two carved and richly-gilt throne chairs, also covered with violet velvet,—one vacant, belonging to the Queen Mother, and the other occupied, though certainly not filled, by Charles the Ninth. The young King was a sickly looking boy of fifteen, with his mother's dark eye and brow,—but there the likeness ended, for the repose of his countenance was more that of vacancy than thought. His frame was so slight, that the

heavy dress of the time,—at least that worn by most princes and great men, namely, a sort of half armour, half velvet, suit,—seemed to oppress him, though made of the lightest materials that the fashion would admit, for his was composed of bright silver chain armour, with a tunic of sapphire-coloured velvet, and, instead of a ruff, he indulged in the luxury of a falling collar of ‘point d’Alençon,’ the cord and tassels of which were composed of small brilliants. Near him, on his right hand, stood a chime of musical bells: this instrument was in a silver frame, of about the height of a modern Psyche, or cheval glass, but only half the width; an arch of the same metal went from one pillar to another, and from within this arch hung nine large-sized silver bells, but of different gradations, from which, music, though not “most eloquent,” was “discoursed,” by striking them with two small silver hammers, both of which the King now held in his right hand. It was evident that, previous to the entrance of the persons from the ante-room, His Majesty had been solacing himself, and delighting his courtiers, with this charming amusement; for, whenever a nudge from the Maréchal de Retz, or a look from Amiot, warned him to attend to a presentation (which he got through by the short and royal road, of

hoping they were well? if Frenchmen; and that they liked France? if foreigners), he would turn shortly round and give a sly tap to his dear bells, till again reminded by another look from the amiable and benevolent Amiot, that he must attend to metal *less* attractive; then an angry flash would gleam from his dark eye on his gentle and, in spite of all that was done to prevent it, even by him, much-loved preceptor, that seemed to say, "Have you not love enough to bear with me, when that rash humour, which my mother gave me, makes me forgetful?"

And while the honest tutor would turn away and deprecatingly shake his head, the wily and serpent-like de Retz, would pityingly shrug his shoulders, and push the bells nearer to the King; for it was nothing to him how unpopular the boy made himself,—nay, the more the country was disturbed, the better, for the more his counsels would be needed. But Charles, with the waywardness of a spoiled child on the present occasion, pushed the bells away, and said, with a pettish sarcasm, that seemed too strong for the feeble lips that uttered it—

"Thank you, Maréchal; when you sigh for further honours, we will create you "Prince of the Bells!"

De Retz bit his lip, and repressed a frown as

he bowed low, and replied : “ I should be guilty of treason were I to reject anything your Highness offered me—even an insult—therefore, I shall treasure this.”

While this scene was passing on the steps of the throne, Ignatius advanced with Théodore de Bèze to where the Chancellor was standing. Both Michel de l’Hôpital’s character and appearance were worthy of the Roman Senate in its palmiest days ; in his lifetime even he had achieved that greatest of all fame, the praise of his opponents. As soon as the Jesuit had explained to him how he had rescued De Bèze from the assaults of the mob, he added—

“ And so I ventured to bring him hither, and now place him at the disposal of the Chancellor de l’Hôpital, whose virtues every one is acquainted with, if even, like me, they have the misfortune not to be personally acquainted with their possessor.”

“ If you are good enough to think *that* a misfortune,” said Michel de L’Hôpital, extending his hand to Ignatius, “ it is one that I can end on the moment, as I shall be happy to accept your friendship ; but for your compliments, I must disclaim them. We live in crooked, dark times, father—hence my renown ; for we all know that the humblest light shines out brightly in the midst of darkness. For you,

‘mon ami,’” said he, turning to Théodore de Bèze, “I am truly sorry; would to God that our countrymen could be persuaded to abandon those firebrand soubriquets of Calvinist, Lutheran, Huguenot, Heretic, and Papist, and only glory in, and act up to, the great name of Christian. Luckily for you, friend, Lainez is not here, and the Duc de Guise, unhappily for us, but happily for you, is away at these dreadful civil wars that are devastating our poor country; and her Majesty has not yet come from the council; therefore I should advise you to profit by the escort of the Cardinal de Châtillon, who, I see, is about to depart. With him you will be safe; for, as Lainez says, his red hat covers his black heresies.”

“I thank you, Monseigneur,” said Théodore de Bèze; “but having come here as a victim, I will not steal away like a thief, but even await her Majesty’s pleasure, and trust to her clemency.”

The Chancellor shook his head, and whispered into the Calvinist’s ear, “Put not thy trust in princes.”

“I do not,” replied the latter aloud; “but I do in the Ruler of princes!”

Ignatius, who had on the previous evening sent the letters he had brought from Philip of

Spain and Francesco de Medici, to the Queen Mother, now received a message through a chamberlain, saying that her Majesty would see him in her closet ; so bowing to the Chancellor, and bidding Théodore de Bèze await his return, he quitted the throne-room, and followed the chamberlain.

“ I wish to goodness the Queen Mother would come ! ” said the young Comte de Saint-André, son of the Maréchal of that name.

Impatient as the young Comte was for the Queen Mother's appearance, he had to wait full three quarters of an hour for that event ; at the end of which time the doors opened at the upper end of the presence-chamber, at the right-hand side of the throne, and, preceded by a numerous suite of ladies, Catherine de Medici entered, Ignatius walking beside her, with whom she was conversing, apparently much pleased with whatever tidings he had communicated to her. In her features were the remains more of comeliness than beauty ; her forehead was high and intellectual, her brows low and straight, her eyes were of so dark a blue as to appear black ; her nose was aquiline, her lips full, her chin heavy, and her whole face, though of a well-formed oval, yet on too large a scale for female beauty. Her figure was stately and

commanding, and large without ‘embonpoint;’ but the dress she wore on the present occasion was particularly becoming to her, being an emerald green velvet, made in the Mary Stuart form, round the epaulettes of which were twisted rows of large diamonds, while down the robings were bunches of lily of the valley, done in emeralds and pearls, but eclipsed by a ‘cordelier,’ that was a perfect gallery of jewels;—the compartments of her standing ruff were divided by long branches of fusia, composed of rubies and brilliants, and attached to the ruff by means of slides at the back, by which they were sewn, so that every time she moved the refraction of the prismatic colours of the precious stones seemed to circle her like a sprinkling rainbow. Her hair (on which the snows of time had not yet fallen) was turned back on a roll, and surmounted by a ‘rezzilia,’ or Mary Stuart cap, of green velvet, with a network of small pearls over the back or cawl, while round the front was a row of large brilliants, every sixth diamond being divided by a large pear-shaped pearl. Her hand was particularly beautiful, a fact of which she seemed perfectly aware, judging from two circumstances, one being the conspicuous manner in which she let it hang listlessly over the side of the throne as

she took her seat; the other was its freedom from rings, notwithstanding that the tyranny of fashion in those days enjoined so many. Instead of turned-up pointed cuffs of 'point d'Alençon,' she had, in imitation of the lace, mural crowns, of emeralds and brilliants, of about six inches high, which certainly appeared more worthy of the beautiful hands they surmounted, than manchettes of mere lace, however costly it might be.

No sooner was the Queen Mother seated, and had made a sort of circular bow to all those near the throne, than Ignatius whispered in the ear of Théodore de Bèze—

“ Fear nothing, I have obtained a ‘ passe-partout’ from the Queen for you.”

The Marquis de Millepropos was the first to advance to the foot of the throne, and bowing profoundly, with the letters patent between both his hands clasped under his chin, he said, in a voice intended to be deeply pathetic, turning first towards the King, and then towards Catherine—

“ These patents, which your Majesties were once so graciously pleased to confer on your unworthy, but not unfaithful servant, you are now as graciously pleased to recall; in laying them at your feet, my diplomatic existence is at

an end—but not so my loyalty. The proudest part of that existence was to think that I was deemed worthy of representing, however dimly, the effulgent sun of majesty! But, as I before said, that existence is now ended.” Here the Marquis made a dramatic pause, and was evidently setting in for a long speech, had he not been interrupted at this juncture by the Queen-mother, who, seizing on his last word, said, in a haughty voice, while a smile played round her mouth,—

“ Well, then, Monsieur le Marquis, it seemeth to us, that your speech could not do better than follow so laudable an example, and be ended too ; for we have other matters of more import than to listen to a funeral oration over your defunct embassy, to whose existence you yourself put an end, by making your palace the resort of the heretical and disaffected, and receiving (though incognito) as our private advices informed us, our worst foes, the King of Navarre and the Prince de Condé.—Denial is vain—for we know the facts, and excuses therefore are impossible,” added Catherine, waving her hand, seeing that the discomfited Marquis was about to speak. “ Therefore come we now to our second charge against you, Monsieur le Marquis ; that of having lent your

fortified château of Quillac, near Drex, in Normandy, to the Signor Vittorio Cappello, for the nefarious purpose of confining and secreting therein the Signorina Arianna Bernardini, niece to the Gonfalonieri of Florence. What plea can you advance why our fullest vengeance should not go forth against you, Xavier de Quillac, Marquis de Millepropos, for such an outrage against the first functionary of our native city?"

"As I live!" quoth the Marquis, "and now stand in the light of your Majesty's countenance—more glorious than the meridian sun, overclouded though it be with just displeasure—'tis the first I've heard of it!"

"This to our face, Marquis!" cried the Queen; "by the rood! 'tis too much, when the damsel hath been your prisoner more than a year."

"I crave your liege's pardon." I meant not to deny that the 'demoiselle' hath been an inmate of the Château de Quillac for the time your Grace doth specify; but this I do protest, that I knew her not to be the niece of the Gonfalonieri of Florence, or I would have blown my castle to atoms ere I would have connived at any affront to one who holds so high a position in what must, in all times, be

considered the most illustrious city in the world, from having had the honour of being your Majesty's birth-place," bowed the Marquis.

Catherine's brow relaxed—she looked for a moment at her delicate and shell-like nails, and then replied.

"Your being ignorant of her relationship to the Gonfalonieri is some slight palliation of your conduct, as far as the offence to ourselves is concerned. But, think you, Marquis de Millepropos, that the abduction of young demoiselles is precisely the occupation suited to your station and years?"

This last word was too much for the poor Marquis, even from a Queen, and for a moment appeared to have the effect of the African weed, which poisons by paralysing; but he soon rallied, and arranging his ruff, he replied in a tone of sarcasm, "None should know better than your Majesty,"—but seeing the lowering expression on Catherine's face, he soon exchanged it for one of adulation—adding, *par parenthèse*—"from your knowledge of human nature—that neither high station nor increasing years can control the follies of the heart."

"Hey day! Monsieur le Marquis, worse and worse," cried the Queen, whose dignity, not

allowing her openly to notice the covert meaning of the Marquis's speech, determined to have her revenge, by publicly making him appear as ridiculous as possible—"Hey day! so it was on your *own* account that you purloined the demoiselle, after all?"

"Not so, may it please your Majesty," said the Marquis, looking bashfully down at the crimson rosettes of his shoes, as if it were sorely against his will that he was *compelled*, in self-defence, to betray the weakness of even a jeweller's daughter—"not so, please your Majesty. This demoiselle Bernardini, as she now turns out to be, passed for the daughter of a 'filadoro' at Venice, one Giovanni Ferrai. Now, having had the honour to be his Majesty's representative in that city, I felt it incumbent upon me to set an example of public morals; therefore, I do assure your highnesses, I never attempted any thing like an inferior conquest, although it *was* rumoured at Venice—" here the Marquis, though in the presence, raised himself on the points of his feet, and again adjusted his ruff;—"although it *was* rumoured at Venice that this demoiselle, whom your Majesties will bear in mind was only *then* supposed to be a jeweller's daughter, did affect me, and—and——"

“And for that reason,” interrupted the Queen, with a broad smile,—while even royalty itself could scarcely subdue the universal laugh that arose at this part of the Marquis’s narrative,—“and for that reason, I suppose,” said the Queen, “to rid yourself of this unhappy maiden’s importunities, you requested your friend, the Count Cappello, to carry her off out of your way; you providing a safe retreat to deposit her and her unrequited attachment in?”

“Not exactly,” said the Marquis, pulling his under lip with his left hand, while, with the right, he kept nervously drawing his sword half in and half out of the scabbard; “but—but”—

“But what, Marquis?” demanded the Queen.

“By the sword of my father, which was the gift of the great Bayard!” exclaimed the Marquis, with desperate courage, as if he thought with such a weapon by his side he ought so far to resemble its illustrious donor, as to be, at least, ‘sans peur,’ “the assistance I rendered Count Vittorio in this unlucky affair, arose solely out of a weak feeling, I allow: but a fear that he should think I bore malice.”

“Indeed! how so?” asked Catherine.

“Why, your Majesty must know,” said the

Marquis, casting his eyes down, and endeavouring to throw into his countenance a mosaic of blighted affection and noble forgiveness, as he first bent the white plume of his hat over the diamond loop and button; and then twisted the diamond loop and button over the plume; and so on alternately; “there once existed an attachment,—that is, an engagement,—between myself and Bianca Cappello, the only sister of the Count Vittorio;—poor thing! she loved me with that vehemence of affection which only Italian women are capable of: for the hearts of Italy are like their soil, full of volcanos—and volcanos must have their out-breakings;—so, one day, the beautiful Bianca exploded in a desperate fit of jealousy, though quite a causeless one,”——

“*That* no one can doubt, Monsieur le Marquis,” interrupted the Queen.

“And in a fit of pique,” continued the Marquis, bowing to Catherine for her speech, which he miraculously converted into a compliment; “she, like a true woman, punished herself, and married another!”

“Marvellous!” said the Queen, “for we had heard a very different version of the demoiselle’s ‘*mésalliance* ;’ but still we do not see what this had to do with your aiding and

abetting the lady's brother, in carrying off the Signorina Bernardini."

"Merely that he might not think I resented his misguided sister's conduct," said the Marquis, with a conclusive and concluding shrug.

"But where was the Filadoro, the demoiselle's reputed father, all this time?" asked the Queen, "to allow you and Count Cappello to carry into effect your designs against his daughter?"

"So please your Majesty, 'tis a poor worthless knave,—one totally devoid of all feeling, conscience, and probity,—who once utterly spoilt the effect of a portrait of me, by allowing one of the brilliants in the setting to protrude too near the nose and mouth."

"An unconscionable varlet, truly!" rejoined the Queen, "to pretend that any thing brilliant could issue from such discreet lips. But, notwithstanding the lucid explanation, Marquis, you have given us of this business, we must inform you, that you will in four-and-twenty hours quit Paris, with such an escort as we may appoint, for your Norman castle of Quillac, and taking from the hands of your seneschal every key appertaining to the said castle, you will deliver them into those of Father Ignatius Dragoni, in the presence of a guard of two

hundred men-at-arms, who will accompany him from Paris to Dreux, and from Dreux to Florence,—we giving him full power to set the Signora Bernardini free, and to secure you, Xavier de Quillac, Marquis de Millepropos, in her place, for the term of one year, dating from the day of your arrival at the castle.”

From this fiat the poor Marquis knew there was no appeal, so he had nothing for it but to bow in silence, and think himself fortunate that it was in his own château, instead of in the Bastile, that his imprisonment was to be. The Maréchal de Retz now whispered something in the Queen’s ear, who added aloud, “And we further outlaw the Count Vittorio Cappello from France, and erase his name from the order of St. Catherine,* of which we had enrolled him a knight.

The fact was, that Vittorio Cappello had received the most solemn promises of zeal and friendship from the Maréchal de Retz ; but he, in the mean time, having received letters from Martin Bernardini, soliciting his good offices in behalf of his niece, the prudent Maréchal thought it more politic to keep well with the

* The Order of St. Catherine was instituted in Palestine, 1063.

powers of his native city, and especially that of the Queen Mother, than to hold sacred any promises he might have made to a Venetian noble, who had only a fictitious position at the French court, which lasted no longer than his actual presence there; consequently, among the loudest inveighers against Vittorio Cappello's misconduct, was his *friend* (!), the Maréchal de Retz.

A few more presentations took place, after the Marquis de Millepropos' disgrace, and but few; for the clock of Notre Dame struck the quarter before noon, the hour of the royal dinner, and the Queen rose to leave the presence chamber; as she passed, Ignatius said, presenting Théodore de Bèze,

“This is the Sieur de Bèze, of whom I spoke to your Majesty.”

Catherine bowed coldly, and turning to the Maréchal de Retz, said, with a meaning look, “Maréchal, you will see that the Sieur de Bèze be *properly* escorted from our palace.”

“In all things your Majesty's pleasure shall be obeyed,” bowed the Maréchal, leaving the presence-chamber by a different egress from the rest of the court.

Ignatius retraced his steps through the ante-room by which he had entered, and which the

musicians were preparing to leave ; taking Salinas's arm, he and the latter also quitted it, but had scarcely reached the first landing, before the yells and hootings of an immense mob reached their ears.

“ What in the name of heaven is the matter now ? ” said the blind musician. “ I rejoice that I cannot see their barbarities, 'tis enough to hear the discordant preludes to them.”

“ You are right, Master Francis,” said the Sieur Montagne, “ and not grateful without due cause ; you only differ from posterity in this, that you hear these horrors, and therefore believe them,—while future ages will hear of them, and scarcely believe that any times could produce men so foolish and so wicked.”

Here another shout drew Ignatius to the balcony of an open window, nor was he singular in the impulse which had caused him to look into the street at what was going on ; for he had no sooner reached the balcony, than he beheld every window in the palace filled with spectators, amongst whom were the whole court, excepting the Queen Mother and the Maréchal de Retz. The young King, with blanched cheeks and strained eye-balls, was looking on at the scene below, with a sort of sickening fear, which nevertheless had its origin neither

in remorse nor humanity ; for that *instinct* against cruelty, which nature roots more or less in all minds, scarcely amounts either to feeling or conscience in hearts where (as in the case of Charles the Ninth) education, habit, and example had done their uttermost to stifle both ; yet unknown to himself, that is, without his being able to trace to its source the moral reaction that was daily revolutionizing his whole system, the atmosphere of bloodshed, tyranny, and treachery he inhaled, were hourly poisoning his springs of life, and all historians have agreed that his mortal malady may be dated from the atrocities of the St. Bartholomew ; as, ill from that period, he closed his short and worse than inglorious career, in 1574, at the early age of four-and-twenty, amid the troubles which were the result of that most horrible massacre.

The scene now enacting beneath the windows of the Louvre, was a second and a more vehement assault on Théodore de Bèze ; the mob having received ‘ mot de guet ’ from the Maréchal de Retz, who had thus correctly interpreted Catherine de Medici’s order to have the Calvinist *properly* escorted from the palace. No sooner, therefore, had De Retz appeared, as if carelessly going about his own business, and

said in an audible voice, with a deprecating shrug of the shoulders as he passed De Bèze, "Encore ce singe d'hérétique !" than a hue and cry arose, and missiles flew in all directions at the devoted head of the Reformer, who bore this second persecution as patiently, and with as little resistance and retaliation as he had done the first. Accustomed as Ignatius was to the dark, tortuous, and sinister proceedings of the Spanish and Italian inquisitions ; yet having by nature that broad and firm calibre of mind, which would have made him a better man had he been placed in better times, he revolted against the gratuitous treachery which had caused this second attack upon the mild and inoffensive being, whom an involuntary impulse had led him to protect ; and in the newly aroused sympathy of his own individual feelings, he forgot that the policy of the day was to shrink from no means, however villainous, by which certain ends might be obtained. All vice at that period was, by the alchemy of the Spartan code, transmuted into virtue ; where no alloy was recognizable or punishable, but detection and failure ; otherwise one of the most infamous women who ever lived, Anne Bulleyn's daughter, would never have come down to posterity, 'plombé,' with the bitter satires

of "Good (!) Queen Bess," and "the Virgin Queen."

Returning to the corridor, the Jesuit made a hasty apology to Francis Salinas, and begging of him to descend with him, and await his return in the inner court, he walked, or rather rushed into the street, and forcing his way through the mob, held the Queen's 'passe-partout,' made out in the name of Théodore de Bèze, high above his head, calling loudly upon the people to desist, as in assailing the present object of their fury, they were guilty of 'lèse Majesté,' as he had a passport from the Queen Mother; just as he spoke, a large tile, or slate, was hurled by an invisible hand from the roof of the Louvre, with such unerring aim, that it fell upon Théodore de Bèze's left arm, and broke it, at which spectacle the rabble ceased their assault, declaring that God had avenged his own cause, for that the missile which had fractured the Calvinist's limb, had come direct from heaven!

"I hope you are not in much pain?" said the Jesuit.

"A mere scratch," replied De Bèze; "what is this splinter of martyrdom to one who, in the right cause, would willingly secure similar honours for his whole person."

“ For the right, eternity must decide,” said Ignatius, gloomily ; “ but as might ever has been, and it is to be feared, ever will be, right, in this world, I would counsel you not to brave it, but take this ‘ passe par-tout ’ of Catherine de Medici’s, and to secure yourself against further evil.”

“ My way,” said the Calvinist, pointing upwards, “ lies yonder, where I doubt the Medicis have little influence ; but for *your* good offices, and better will, I thank you ; and now farewell ; do by others as you have done by me. Prevent if you can your brethren from kindling the fire of their zeal with what they choose to denominate heretic fuel ; and, despite controversy and party spirit, I will hope,” added he, extending his hand, “ that we may yet meet in another and a juster world.”

“ Amen,” responded Ignatius, in an under voice, lest any of the bystanders should overhear his heterodoxy ; “ but ere we part in this, let me at least conduct you to a surgeon’s, who may, in some sort, remedy the ill which hath befallen you.”

“ I thank you, Father, with all the gratitude your benevolence deserves ; but ’twere a foul return for so much kindness, were I to allow

you to jeopard your own safety, by too great a care for mine,—and I need not tell you that your Church looks upon the members of our's as the pitch which none can touch without being defiled."

As Ignatius could not gainsay this assertion, he confined himself to pressing upon the Calvinist the Queen's passport.

"I will take it," replied Théodore, "not to treat ungraciously what it may have cost you some trouble to obtain; but for the efficacy of the Queen Mother's *promises* of protection we have just had an example."

"Nay," said Ignatius, "at the time of the 'émeute' you were not in possession (thanks to my neglect) of the Queen's 'passe partout;' or, doubtless, had you been able to produce it, no attack would have been made upon you."

"'Comme de raison,'" rejoined De Bèze, shaking his head; "'vous prêchez pour votre paroisse;' but had I had fifty, my mind mis-gives me that the result would have been the same."

As such was the Jesuit's conviction also, he merely repeated his 'adieux,' and, shaking the Calvinist hastily, but cordially, by the hand, he watched him for some few seconds, till he was

out of sight, and then retraced his steps to the inner court of the Louvre, where Francis Salinas was awaiting him, and, linking the blind man's arm within his own, they proceeded together to the ordinary of the 'Champ du drap d'or.'

CHAPTER III.

“Dieu! qu’il est amusant! mais c’est un vrai trésor!
 Il a ressuscité les mœurs du siècle d’or;
 Il dîne le matin, à l’antique il s’habille,
 Et j’ai cru voir marcher un portrait de famille.”

L’ECOLE DES VIEILLARDS,
Par Casimir Delavigne.

——— “Little do we know of fate;
 Perhaps our fortune is not in our power.
 We are the sport and plaything of high heaven,
 And while the second cause presumes to act,
 Think, and reflect, is acted by the first.
 As the great mover sets us, so we go.”

Charles Johnson’s MEDÆA.

IN that quarter of the Faubourg St. Germain, where now lies the rue de Bac,—in whose ‘spirituel’ atmosphere Madame de Staël so sensibly delighted, notwithstanding all she wrote about the ‘beau ciel d’Italie;’ not far from the hôtel where the great and good Chateaubriand still lives, and in which Miss Clarke holds her agreeable ‘réunions’ of

‘beaux esprits,’—where, from the amiable hostess downwards, one meets none but those who are

“Correct with spirit, eloquent with ease,
Intent to reason, or polite to please;”

but still nearer the present site of that cheapest of all cheap ‘Magasins,’ le petit St. Thomas,—bloomed, in the time of Charles the Ninth, of France, a large range of public gardens, which, from their extensive and umbrageous groves of lime and mulberry trees, were in those days called the ‘mille feuilles.’ In the midst of these gardens stood a large pavilion, of two stories high, the gable ends of which being cased in tin, and the thick cluster of chimneys being capped with the same metal, gave it, as they glittered in the morning sun, the appearance of a silver minaret: this custom of capping chimneys, and intersecting the roofs of houses, with tin—a custom which is still common in some parts of Piedmont and Savoy—was introduced into France in the thirteenth century. Before this pavilion was a ‘perron,’ with a double flight of steps,—one leading to the right, the other to the left; from the centre window, immediately above the ‘perron,’ obtruded a large gilt board, about two yards square, upon which were placed two small

mimic horses, in rich housings and caparisons, studded with coloured glass—which enacted the part of precious stones: on these steeds were seated two mail-clad figures, with lances in rest,—one representing the gay, gallant Francis the First; the other,—which was a much more unwieldy personage, and whose raised visor displayed a face, bearing a strong family likeness to a colossal love-apple, or tomato,—personating England's eighth Harry. Under this insignia appeared, in raised gilt letters, the following announcement:

“ Au Champ du Drap d'Or, Fabien Lardoire tient Auberge et Restaurant. Dîners en Seigneurs et en Bourgeois; bons Vins, en divers qualités, à la portée de tout le monde. Demain on donnera à dîner pour rien. Entrez toujours.”

Thus invited, most of ‘freluquets’ of Paris, (for ‘petit maître’ was an unborn title till two centuries afterwards), with the keen goadings of a noon-day appetite, ascended the steps of this then fashionable resort, and on reaching the balcony of the ‘perron,’ they entered by an open glass door, into a large oak-floored room, the numerous lattice-windows of which were pleasantly shaded by a luxuriant vine, and the clustering bunches of its purple fruit. Round

the walls, which were also in panels of dark polished oak, were to be seen suspended (while their owners dined) rapiers, gloves, and hats, of every fashion, from the broad-leafed scarlet glories of the cardinal's, down to the rich velvet plumed and jewelled 'casquette' of the gay noble, and the plain steeple-crowned beaver of the Huguenot. At the upper end of this immense room, on a dais, were placed about a dozen tolerably large, long oak tables, with an oak frame-work going round the bottom, which served as a foot-stool for the guests; these tables, which were reserved for the 'dîners à seigneurs,' were distinguished by snow-white table cloths of 'damasine,' tied at each corner in a large knot, similar to that represented in Leonardo da Vinci's fresco of the Last Supper. On every table, at right angles, was placed a very large oval brazen bason filled with snow, in which was embedded large globular glass caraffes of water, pewter flagons of table wine, and flasks of Burgundy, Sack, Xeres, Canary, Hippocras, and Malvoisie, for such as chose to call for them.—Half a dozen octagon pewter plates were piled before each guest; and by the side of them one silver round apostle spoon, and one two-pronged steel, or rather iron, fork, with a horn handle—but knives were

not—for each person brought his own; and the napkins were of a texture that would have made irreproachable curry-combs. At the opposite side of the plate to that on which the fork and spoon were placed, stood a tall-stemmed Venice wine-glass, and a small pewter drinking flagon—while between every four persons was a pewter donkey, with panniers of the same metal, one containing salt, the other pepper. In the lower part of the room were ‘*tables bourgeoises*’ in every direction, laid much after the same fashion as those just described, but with rather coarser materials, which to modern notions may appear difficult. At the other end of the room, opposite the dais, behind a sort of ‘*comptoir*,’ stood, in suit of brightest blue and newest fustian, with well starched ruff, and snow-white night cap, mine host, Fabien Lardoire, and Gona-relle, his wife, receiving the money and presiding over the respective destinations of the contents of two huge pewter tureens—so huge, that they looked more like baptismal fonts than ‘*soupières*.’ Dame Lardoire had, with true feminine ambition, over-stepped her sphere in the article of dress far more than her spouse, whose only decorations were the carving-knives and ‘*couteaux de chasse*’ which studded his gir-

dle ; while his 'chère moitié' had discarded the woollen petticoat worn by ladies of her class, for one of quilted Padusoy silk 'rayée' brown and rose ; her blue woollen stockings also displayed silver clocks ; her apron was of the newest 'guimpeur ;' but her ruff, it is true, was made of a material of the last year's mode, called 'rêve de jeune fille,' and forgotten for some months by eyes polite, since 'amour passager' was preferred at court, as being more convenient *for all suits* ; but 'en revanche,' dame Gonarelle's breast-knot was of bright rose-coloured ribbon, edged with silver, denominated 'à la Diane, as the 'fabrique' had been invented for the Duchesse de Valentinois, on whom it had, for the first time, appeared the preceding week ; while, though last not least, Madame Lardoire's cap border was of the very finest Flander's lace—to say nothing of her high pointed hat being decorated on the left side with a bunch of carnations, fastened in with a gold slide, which by the ordinary course of things would never have got there ; but then, Gonarelle's face was no ordinary one—and she knew it. How could she do otherwise,—since on the very first day that Fabien had opened the 'Champ du drap d'or' to the 'publice,' some score of 'grands seig-

neurs,' to make it the fashion, had come to dine there ; and the Cardinal de Lorraine, in telling her to remove a plate of ' guignes,'* had said they wanted none, but those in her eyes.

It was not the custom in France, in the sixteenth century, for women to dine at the few places of public entertainment then existing ; but as it was never the fashion in that country to mew them up as domestic drudges, and dedicate all the good things of this world solely to the lords of the creation, as in England, they were generally to be seen, towards three o'clock in the afternoon, gliding, with their all-conquering toilettes, sipping their lemonade, and listening to the music, through the shady retreats of the ' Mille feuilles,' or other places of amusement in or about Paris. Within the ordinary (for café it could not be called, since coffee, which only crept into Venice in 1543, did not reach France till 1644, when it was brought by a Turkish merchant to Marseilles),† within the ordinary, then, beyond the four

* ' Guignes' are a species of black cherries.

† Coffee was first introduced into England by a Mr. Nathaniel Canopus, a Cretan, who made it his daily beverage at Baliol College, Oxford, in 1641. The first coffee-house in England was kept by Jacob, a Jew, at the sign of the Angel, in Oxford, in 1650. Mr. Edwards, an English Turkey merchant, brought home with him a Greek servant, who kept the

‘marmitons’ who carried the viands to and fro, not a ‘garçon’ was to be seen, as all the attendants were smartly dressed grisettes, whose costume only varied from that of their mistress, in the less costly materials of which it was composed.

The ‘potage’ which Fabien now meted out was very different from either the ‘Julien’ or ‘Jardinière’ of the present day, being a hotch-potch of bread, butter, game, and all conceivable vegetables; but, nevertheless, emitting an odour which would have obviated the necessity of *compelling* even Dominie Samson to eat; while that distributed by his wife was a ‘purée de lentils à la crème’—called, at the time, ‘délices des Capelans;’*—after which followed, ‘Bœuf à la Cardinal,’ which were ‘filets’ of beef with olives; then came ‘Gigots à l’Henri Huit,’ or roast legs of mutton, embedded in white ‘haricot’ beans, done in a sort of red sauce, with garlic; these were succeeded by Bayonne hams, baked in champagne, with a ‘purée’ of chestnuts, whose satellites were small ‘plats’ of ‘salmis,’ or, as they were then

first house for making and selling coffee in London 1652; and the Rainbow coffee-house, near Temple-bar, was, in 1657, petitioned against as a nuisance to the neighbourhood.

* ‘Capelan’ means a poor ignorant priest.

called, 'plantureux,' of poultry and game of every description; which, in their turn, were replaced by vegetables and roasted tongues à l'Espagnol, studded with cloves and 'cornichons.' The last 'hor-d'œuvre' was a course of fish, which seemed to contain a sample of every fish in the sea, from 'Esturgeon héliété,' which was sturgeon, dressed in what our modern 'cuisine' terms a 'Mayonnèse,' down to that worst of all bad things (gastronomically speaking), 'thon marinée.' Then came the roasts, with their fragrant salads,—in the making of which "onion atoms" had "mingled in the bowl,"—thus anticipating the incomparable receipt of Sydney Smith, who is always equally admirable and equally witty, whether in his directions for the concoction of a salad, or in his remonstrances against a three-and-a-half per cent. feeding tax on the horses' oats. After the roasts came the grand 'finale' of 'plats doux,' consisting of what, in England, at that time, were called 'Puptons' of fruit, and in France, 'Poëllons à la jardinière,'—being nothing more than what are now called 'Macédoines' of cherries, strawberries, grapes, &c. &c.; while creams, 'pâtisserie,' 'nougat,' and 'massepains,' or sweet cakes, without end, concluded the repast.

Just as Ignatius and Salinas ascended the steps of the 'perron' of the 'Champ du drap d'or,' the Marquis de Millepropos brushed past them. It may appear strange, knowing how quickly the news of his disgrace at court would make the tour of the town, and the snow-ball additions it was likely to gather in its progress, that the ex-ambassador should have selected so public a place as the ordinary of the 'Mille feuilles' to parade his fallen fortunes in, on the last day that remained to him of liberty: but he took a different view of the case, and was determined, by his presence, to arrest for at least a few hours, the virulence of the remarks likely to be made on his recall from Venice, and, at the same time, to give his own colouring to the affair, by announcing himself as the 'victime d'une sexe perfide.' But, alas! misfortune brings us at once to the sunset of life, and lengthens our shadows before us! so that the news of the poor marquis's disgrace had preceded him at least by ten minutes: the first consequence of which was, that as, according to a daily practice of his, he proceeded, 'en passant,' to chuck Madame Fabien's pretty little dimpled chin, whispering, by way of accompaniment, "Gonarelle, tu êtes une ange!" the dame

saucily replied, aloud, while she turned her diamond glances on the young Duc de la Trémouille, and nearly jerked a ladlefull of scalding soup over the Marquis's daintily embroidered glove, " 'Et vous, Monsieur le Marquis, vous êtes quelque chose de plus,—car vous êtes un mésange.' " *

" 'Insolente !' " muttered the indignant Marquis, as he strode forward, and hung his black velvet steeple-crowned hat, with its glittering band of costly jewels, against the wall,—where, at that moment, could he have had his way, he would much rather have hung Gonarelle's head, as an effectual method of suspending her impertinent answers. Next disembarassing himself of his rapier, he took his seat at one of the tables, on the dais, in which he was left in unmolested possession,—as a disgraced courtier is seldom importuned with the civilities of his acquaintance.

Salinas and Ignatius were scarcely seated, before the latter perceived, at another table, behind him, on his right hand, a Spanish hidalgo, by name Don Silvas y Mendez, who was, while waiting for his soup, surveying the apartment and the guests, as they continued to

* A tomtit.

pour in, the latter being evidently all strangers to him.

“Ha, Don Silvas, well met!” said the Jesuit, tilting back his ‘tabouret,’ and placing his hand upon the Spaniard’s shoulder.

“Padre, your most obedient,—I am enchanted to see you! May you live a thousand years! I left Don Manuel thriving to the uttermost of his wishes; and the splendour of his new ‘coche’ dividing the attention of all Madrid with the miraculous escape of the Prince of Calatrava,” said Don Silvas.

“Ah, by the way, what is the real truth of that affair? and what has the promotion of that poor Padre Ruy Lopez to the rich bishopric of Segovia to do with it? Some say that Philip gave him the bishopric from his being the best chess-player in Spain; while others write me a garbled account of Lopez owing it to the Prince of Calatrava. Which way lies the truth?”

“‘Chi lo sa, non scrive; chi lo scrive non sa,’”* said a low clear voice, before Don Silvas y Mendez had time to reply. Startled at the sound, both he and the Jesuit looked up, and

* Those who know it don’t write, and those who write know nothing of the matter.

the latter perceived, seated at the table with the Spaniard, but at the opposite side, the same tall, dignified-looking personage who had passed through the ante-room, from the Queen's closet, that morning, at the Louvre, and bowed so graciously to the crowd awaiting the opening of the doors of the presence chamber.

“As I before remarked, gentlemen,” said the stranger, drawing his stool round to the table where the Jesuit and Salinas were sitting, and motioning to Don Silvas to join the coterie, as he continued, with as much ease as if he had known the trio all his life, and in the same low, clear tone of voice, while Ignatius and Don Silvas, but especially the latter, listened to him with distended eyes and suspended breath. “As I before remarked, gentlemen, those who know the real history of Ruy Lopez' elevation to the bishopric of Segovia don't write about it, and those who write about it know nothing of the matter. So that, in all probability, it will go down, with many other fictions, as an historical fact to posterity, that Ruy Lopez, the poor priest, owed his sudden and extraordinary elevation to his skill as a chess-player; and as well that as any other fable, since, as Miguel Cervantes truly observes, ‘Life itself is a game of chess.’ But the real facts are these, for there

is always, upon an average, about one grain of truth to every bushel of falsehood. You are aware that Don Ramiez de Biscaye, who was the Prince de Calatrava's rival suitor for the hand of the fairest lady in all Castile, Donna Estella d'Ossuna, laid before Philip of Spain, some short time ago, the particulars of a plot which he had discovered, by means of an intercepted correspondence of the Prince of Calatrava with the court of France, wherein the Prince figured as chief conspirator against the life of Philip the Second, instigator of a revolution, and aspirant to the throne of Spain. In proportion to the great love the King had borne to Calatrava, so was now the extent of his anger and vengeance against him; and ordering him immediately under arrest, with a warrant for his execution before sunset, he overwhelmed Don Ramiez with expressions of gratitude, the promise of Donna Estella's hand, and a command to get letters patent made out against that evening for the royal signature, creating him Duke and Governor of Valencia, in recompense of the service he had done the state by the detection of the Prince of Calatrava's treasonable plot. That very evening Philip, to show how little the fate of his late favourite weighed with him, convoked more

than his usual court, in the only portion of his new palace of the Escorial that is yet finished, and among others, Domine Ruy Lopez had the honour of a summons to contend with his Majesty at his favourite game. The nobles, according to the etiquette of the court of Spain, were ranged round the combatants, standing the whole time, and looking as immoveable as the pawns and knights on the royal chess-board,—all except the young Count d'Ossuna, who seemed equally overpowered with mental anguish, at the fate of his illustrious cousin Calatrava, and bodily fatigue at standing so long. In the midst of the game, just as the King was on the point of being check-mated,—that is according to the disposition of the chessmen,—and Ruy Lopez was plunged into the very lowest depths of reflection and dilemma, as to how he should avoid so disrespectful and impolitic a move as that of check-mating a monarch, the ‘haute-lisse,’ or tapestry, became suddenly agitated, and from the secret panneling behind, Fernando Calavar, the state executioner, appeared. You well know Calavar’s person,—the heavy brows, bull-neck, and short bushy beard, which gives him the appearance of half brute, half man, as though nature had formed him in a patent mould expressly for the office which he fills.

Philip's brows knit, a doubly imperious expression stole freezingly over his dark features, his right foot stamped the ground, and his right hand involuntarily grasped the hilt of his sword, as he turned to Calavar and seemed to ask if Calatrava was dead."—

"Why he *did* ask it, and in a voice of thunder," interrupted Don Silvas y Mendez, who had hitherto listened to the stranger's narration with a sort of bewildered and breathless attention, not touching any of the different viands placed before him; while the Jesuit and this mysterious 'unibra' who had thought fit to join their circle, quietly discussed their dinners, as the one talked and the other listened. The stranger waved his hand, as if deprecating further observations on the part of Don Silvas, and then in the same low, clear, unbroken tone, continued from the last words he had spoken, as though no interruption had ever taken place.

"But the Prince of Calatrava was not dead, for the executioner came to announce, that the prisoner demanded, in right of his being a Grandee of Spain, the privilege of dying by the axe and the block, and of passing with an ecclesiastic the three last hours of his life. Be this as it might"—

"Señor, you forget," again interrupted Don

Silvas, “ that the King then inquired if the royal confessor, the Bishop of Segovia, had not been with the prisoner ?” Here Don Silvas paused, with a sort of fear that he had said too much, and had offended the stranger by this second interruption ; but the latter, instead of resuming the thread of his discourse, said, as he helped himself to salad and called for a flask of Burgundy,—“ Go on, Señor, and when you come to the dungeon scene, which I think I know more about than you, I will save you the trouble of continuing.”

Apparently much relieved by the sound of his own voice, for he had more than half fancied himself in a strange supernatural dream all this while, Don Silvas proceeded :—

“ ‘ Sire,’ replied Calavar, ‘ a holy father is with him, but the Prince obstinately refuses to receive absolution from any prelate but the Bishop of Segovia ; alleging that such is the right of every noble condemned for high treason.’

“ ‘ Such *are* our rights,’ said the indignant d’Ossuna, boldly ; ‘ and we exact from your Majesty the privileges of our cousin.’

“ These daring words of the young Count seemed like a firebrand thrown into the midst of the hitherto hermetically sealed combustibles

of the courtiers' discontent; for at this signal Don Diego de Terraxas, the venerable Count de Valencia, drawing up his gigantic figure to its full height, and holding within the mailed glove of his left hand, his baton of grand constable of Spain, as with his right he grasped his long and ponderous Toledo, exclaimed in a voice that seemed to have gone back some fifty years, and borrowed the strength and clearness of life's early spring—

“ ‘ Our rights and the King's justice are inseparable: who denies the one, or withholds the other, jeopardizes the throne of Spain !’ ”

“ ‘ Our rights and privileges !’ cried all the nobles at once. These words, which seemed to be repeated by a thousand echoes through the palace, made Philip bound, as with an electric shock, from his seat.

“ ‘ By the bones of Campeador ! by the souls of my fathers,’ thundered he, as his glittering Toledo leaped from its scabbard, ‘ I have sworn neither to eat, nor sleep, till the gory head of the traitor Gusman Calatrava is brought to me. So be it as I said ; but Don Tarraxas is right, the justice of a King confirms the rights of his subjects. Señor Constable, where lives the nearest Bishop ?’ ”

“ ‘ Sire,’ replied Tarraxas, “ I am more con-

versant with the affairs of the camp than those of the church ; your Almoner here, Don Silvas, will be able to inform you on this subject better than I can.'

" ' So please your Majesty,' said I, with fear and trembling, ' the Bishop of Segovia is attached to the Royal household, but the prelate who filled that benefice is dead within the last week, and the 'fecit' for nominating his successor is still on the council table, and has to be submitted to the Pope for his veto ; but there is going to be at Valladolid a meeting of the heads of the Church next week ; all the bishops will be there, and the Bishop of Madrid left his palace yesterday to attend it.'

" As I ceased speaking, a joyous smile lit up the features of d'Ossuna, which was natural, as the condemned Prince was not only this young man's kinsman, but his dearest friend. The King perceived this unguarded smile, and his eye immediately kindled with a new expression of mingled impatience, and the triumph of covert authority.

" ' We are King here,' said he, with a preternatural degree of external calm, which scarcely concealed the storm that raged within ; ' our Royal person must not be the target either for trifling or disobedience ; this sceptre,

Señors,' continued he, lifting the small flagreed state sceptre from an adjoining table, and holding it out at arm's length, 'this sceptre appears to you slight, but he who has the temerity, either to doubt its power, or to brave it, slight as it seems, shall find that it can crush and blast him as effectually as the most ponderous thunderbolt ever hurled from Heaven! For the rest, our Holy Father the Pope is a little in arrears with us, and we do not fear his disapprobation in the step we are about to take; and since the King of Spain can at his pleasure create a prince, we see no earthly reason why he should not by the same volition create a bishop; rise, then, Don Ruy Lopez, Bishop of Segovia. We, Philip the Second, King of Spain, by the grace of God, do ordain you as such, and command you forthwith to take your rank in the Church.'

"As you may suppose, every one was panic-struck. Ruy Lopez regained his feet mechanically: he tried to speak; but, with his poor parish curacy, his tongue seemed also fled; at length he stammered out—

" 'May it please your Majesty——'

" 'Silence! my lord bishop,' cried the King, 'and obey the orders of your Sovereign; the ceremonies of your inauguration shall be gone

through on a future day, and our subjects will not fail to recognize our pleasure in this affair. Bishop of Segovia, it is our will that you now repair to the dungeon of the condemned traitor Gusman de Calatrava, shrive his soul of its foul sins, and, in three hours from this, deliver his body into the hands of Fernando Calavar, who will introduce his neck to the axe, whose acquaintance he has stood upon the ceremony of making, though a hempen ruff might have served his purpose. And *you*, Calavar, we will await you in this chamber :—you will bring us the traitor's head ; and beware of all unnecessary delay, for we sup not till Don Gusman, Prince de Calatrava, and Duke of Medina Sidonia, is no more : that our word may be fulfilled, for as our worthy Constable Don Diego de Tarraxas truly observes, the *rights* of the subject are inseparable from the justice of the sovereign. Ha, ha, ha !' concluded Philip, with his low, inward bitter laugh, as reseating himself at the chess-board, he said to Don Ramiez de Biscaye, ' Come, Señor, we depute you to finish the Bishop's game ; and our loyal nobles here may look on, lest they find the time tedious till the arrival of their friend, the *head* of the Calatrava family.'

Philip then motioned to Ruy Lopez to ap-

proach, and said, 'Here, my lord bishop,' (for he seemed never to tire of repeating Lopez's new title), 'take this our signet ring, in order that the prisoner may have no excuse for doubting your authority;' and then turning to the assembled courtiers, he added, 'Well, senors, dare you still doubt the justice of your King?'

"All maintained a profound silence—and even Don Ramiez seemed uneasy upon the velvet cushion upon which he was kneeling, according to etiquette, as his Majesty's partner at chess."—

Here the stranger placed the Burgundy before Don Silvas, and with the most perfect 'sang froid,' and in the same evenly modulated voice, resumed the narration with as much ease as if he had never been interrupted.

"No sooner had Ruy Lopez quitted the presence, senors," continued he, "then he walked behind Calavar with such bewildered and down-cast looks, that any one would have supposed that, instead of being thus suddenly translated to a bishopric, he was a victim just made over to the executioner; the fact is, the worthy man was under the influence of one of those freaks of imagination which sometimes make persons believe in the intervention of fairies, and other supernatural agencies. In his heart

(far from the precincts of the Escorial I say it), he almost cursed the King and the court: true, he was a bishop of Segovia; but at how terrible a price had the honour been purchased! Why should he be made the means of conducting to the block a man who had never offended him? nay, whom he loved so much,—Don Gusman, who gave the best dinners in Madrid; the Prince of Calatrava, who (next to himself) was the best chess-player in Spain; and if ‘*nolo episcopari*’ could have unfrocked him, he would at that moment have repeated it with all sincerity. But, alas! Bishop of Segovia he was—not so much by the grace of God, as by the disgrace of Don Gusman—and bishop of Segovia he must remain, even though it should entail upon him the shriving of fifty Princes of Calatrava for execution. Nothing therefore remained for him but to pray that the marble colonnades, through which he passed on his way to the dungeons, might close upon him, or the tessellated pavement might open and swallow him up; for either of these catastrophes he prayed impartially and sincerely—but he prayed in vain! These pious aspirations in their perturbed throes had so muddled his chronological ideas, that he found himself in the Prince of Calatrava’s dungeon before he

thought he had got beyond the outside of the presence-chamber. The first act of devotion the new-made prelate performed was, to throw himself into the arms of Don Gusman, and to sob like a child, till the smiles of the prisoner dried his tears. They then knelt down together, and passed an hour in prayer; after which, they arose and conversed: what counsels and consolations the worthy bishop made use of in his exhortations I know not; but at the expiration of half an hour he drew from his vest a chess-board and a bag of chess-men; and he and the Prince commenced a vigorous combat. Thus employed, the three probationary hours expired before either was aware of their approach; the first intimation they had of it, being the shooting of the heavy and rusty bolts of the dungeon door, and the re-appearance of Calavar, accompanied by two halberdiers, all three armed with battle-axes, —those of the two soldiers covered with black crape, but that of the executioner gleaming out in fearful brightness, as the light of the torches held by him and his companions fell upon it. Calavar demanded his prey, who, it was evident, petitioned for a further reprieve to finish his game; but the official no doubt pleaded the King's commands, as being immutable; whereat

Ruy Lopez, clearing the rude block table at which they were playing, with one bound seized the glittering battle-axe of the executioner, before the latter was aware of his intention; and, re-seating himself, resumed the game with perfect composure; while, by brandishing the deadly weapon in his right hand, he kept the soldiers and Calavar at bay—the executioner all the time trembling in his shoes to think how he should answer this delay to the King, or rather, making sure that his head would have to answer for it. At the expiration of a quarter of an hour, the Prince de Calatrava had check-mated the Bishop. Both arose—the latter returning the battle-axe to Calavar,—the former, with great dignity, waving his hand to him in intimation that he was then ready to follow him. Don Gusman walked with a firm step and an erect bearing,—not so Ruy Lopez, whose every limb shook like one in the palsy, and whose bewilderment of mind was such, that he even forgot to take away his chess-board, though for years he had never moved without that appendage. The dungeon doors closed with a lugubrious and hollow sound, which echoed and re-echoed—I *conclude*—through the damp vaulted subterranean corridors—for the Bishop of Segovia started at

every echo—while ever and anon, as if to bid him be of good cheer, Calatrava affectionately pressed his hand. In this order they at length reached an open court, where the block, with its pall-like hangings, was already dressed; with a common black wooden coffin at its base, devoid of velvet, and the escutcheon of the Calatravas, done in iron work, but *effaced*, as is the custom in Spain, for all those who perish by the hand of the headsman for high treason. Innumerable torches blazed through the open space, and seemed to add new terrors to the deadly preparations, as their red glare fell upon the heavy armour of the band of motionless soldiers that stood with their arquebuses reversed round the block, at the foot of which Don Gusman again embraced Ruy Lopez, presenting him with a brilliant ring of priceless value; this done, he ungirded his sword, and gave it to Calavar, and, next, unfastening his ruff and baring his throat, he flung a well-filled purse among the soldiers, who had all the inclination in the world to have rent the air with ‘vivas!’ had not compassion made them feel how bitter a mockery it would have been. These last arrangements finished, the Prince de Calatrava ascended the steps of the scaffold, and walked towards death with the

same noble and undaunted bearing with which he had walked through life : as he knelt down, to forward his last prayer to that God before whom he was so shortly to appear, the solemn stillness of the scene was only broken by the ill-suppressed sobs of the spectators ;—another moment, however, and a tumult arose,—the executioner paused,—the bishop ceased crossing himself,—the soldiers fell back, and the victim alone continued praying,—as through the crowd rushed the Grand Constable of Spain, Don Diego de Tarraxas, holding high above his head, at the end of his ‘baton,’ the King’s warrant to suspend the execution of the Prince of Calatrava, who was instantly remanded back to the presence. ‘Am I in time?’ the old man *seemed to say*,—and then his athletic figure sank down, with the feebleness of an infant, on the coffin that had been prepared for Don Gusman, and life appeared extinguished, had not the night-wind, that blew about his silver hair, fanned him into returning consciousness, and the power of assisting his friend Calatrava to descend from the scaffold.”

“And now, señor,” added the stranger, turning to Don Silvas, “have the goodness, while I finish my wine, to relate to this worthy padre and his friend what befell the Prince of

Calatrava and Ruy Lopez, after they returned with the Grand Constable to the King."

Don Silvas y Mendas stared at this strange being, who, with the blindest and most courtly manner, nevertheless issued such fiat-like mandates to people whom he had never seen before,—either to talk or be silent, as his own humour dictated; but Don Silvas was himself too well-bred to give vent to his surprise in words, especially as he was determined, as soon as the history of Ruy Lopez's sudden elevation was ended, to try and elucidate, if possible, sundry peculiarities and discrepancies that had occurred in the stranger's mode of relating the story, which had greatly excited his curiosity,—the more so as he never remembered to have seen him at the court of Spain, or elsewhere in Andalusia; and the Spanish he spoke was by no means the pure language of Madrid, but tainted with a foreign accent, and Italianized idiom;—therefore, slightly bowing his acquiescence, Don Silvas continued:

"From the time that Ruy Lopez had quitted the room with Calavar, we all stood, half-dead with fatigue and chagrin, looking on at the interminable royal game; at length, at the expiration of the three hours, Don Remiez de Biscaye suffered himself to be check-mated. Charmed

(as he always is) at the result, Philipp pushed aside the chess-board, and leaning back in his chair, said, 'It is not fair that so loyal a subject as Don Ramiez de Biscaye should ever play a losing game—except at chess—so we would e'en sign, while waiting for supper, and the arrival of our two additional guests, the new Bishop of Segovia and the *late* Prince of Calatrava, the letters patent we ordered to be made out this morning, creating him our trusty and well-beloved cousin the Duke and Governor of Valencia. Señor count, are they ready for our signature?' Don Ramiez trembled and turned pale, as if this weight of royal favour oppressed him,—but the King grew impatient, and extended his hand for the letters patent. Thus pressed, Don Ramiez knelt down, and, in a sort of agitated precipitation, withdrew a scroll of parchment from his bosom, and placed it in the King's hands, who said, as he received them, 'to sign these patents will be the pleasantest act we have performed to-day:—the headsman has by this time done his part, of punishing the traitor, it is therefore high time that the monarch should perform his, that of

rewarding fidelity.' Philip then unrolled the parchment, and ran his eyes over it:—suddenly fire seemed to flash from them; his cheek blanched; his lip quivered, as he exclaimed, falling back in his chair, '*Mother of God! What do I behold?*' then, suddenly rallying, and seizing the pen, with which he was to have signed the letters patent for Don Ramiez's dukedom, he wrote a hasty reprieve for the Prince de Calatrava, with an order for him instantly to repair to the presence, accompanied, however, by Calavar, who was instructed to leave the soldiers and scaffold as they were,—ready for an execution. With this warrant Don Diego de Tarraxas was instantly despatched, without being apprised of any of the particulars that had given rise to it; nor were we, till after his departure,—when imagine our astonishment, to say nothing of our delight, at finding that Don Ramiez, in his hurry, instead of giving Philip the letters patent as he thought, had given him a well-concocted plot of his own, for assassinating the King, with a detailed account (as it was intended for Cardinal Ximenes, at Rome), of how he intended to accuse the Prince

de Calatrava of a conspiracy against Philip, through the pretended medium of an intercepted correspondence: whereby he should achieve the three great objects of his ambition,—namely, to rid himself of a hated rival with Donna Estella, and to advance himself in the monarch's good graces, so as to be placed nearer his person, in order that he might with the greater facility carry his regicide designs into execution. Philip crumpled the parchment convulsively in his hand, which trembled strongly from violent excitement, and, as soon as he could speak, he turned to Don Ramiez with a forced and appalling calm, and said,

“ ‘ Don Ramiez de Biscaye, said we not that you should be rewarded? and by our kingdom so you shall, anon. We were for giving you a paltry dukedom, and the government of Valencia—mere bagatelles, which the mutability of human affairs, a conspiracy, for instance, or our death, might any day have deprived you of. 'Tis true at the time we were about to confer on you these grants, we were ignorant of the *nature* and *extent* of the obligations we were

under to you ; but now that knowledge hath superseded ignorance, we will take special heed that our recompense be commensurate to the services you designed us ; we, therefore, command, that instead of assuming the government of Valencia, which you could not have done under a week's delay, you *forthwith* take the place of the Prince of Calatrava, on the scaffold which is now ready dressed below ; thus saving you all the heart-sickenings of hope deferred.'

“ Don Ramiez looked so much more like a livid corpse than a living man, that it required a very slight stretch of imagination to believe that Philip's words alone had fulfilled their purport. At this juncture the doors were thrown open, and Don Gusman, Ruy Lopez, the Grand Constable, and Calavar appeared. Before they had quite reached the upper end of the room where Philip and the court were standing, the King cried with a loud voice, as he pointed to Don Ramiez—

“ ‘ Fernando Calavar, *you* are in the habit of rewarding traitors ; Don Ramiez de Biscaye

awaits your good offices, and we await his head! See that it be with us at supper, in one quarter of an hour from this time.'

"Don Ramiez, who had his arms folded and his eyes bent on the ground, suffered Calavar, without any resistance (which he knew would be useless), to place his heavy hand upon his shoulder, and so conduct him from the presence; the King the whole time (while we all preserved a profound silence) pointing after him, with his high raised right hand, which held the parchment detail of the conspiracy, till the doors closed on the conspirator, when lowering his arm, and grasping the hilt of his sword, he slowly walked round the circle of courtiers as they stood, and looking in all our faces separately, and intently, for about a second, he exclaimed, in that iron tone so peculiar to him, which seems to bend, if not to break, the spirits of all who hear it—

" 'Well, señors, if any *now* doubt the justice of their King, let them speak.'

" 'None! Viva el Re!' resounded through the chamber. As soon as the tumult had subsided, Ruy Lopez, who understood nothing of

all he saw and heard, tremblingly threw himself at Philip's feet, and said—

“ ‘ Sire, I am alone guilty of having disobeyed your Majesty's commands ; I it was who seduced the Prince of Calatrava into beguiling the few hours remaining to him of life with a farewell game of chess ; I it was who seized Calavar's axe and threatened to make him feel it if he did not give us an additional quarter of an hour to finish our game ; mine, in both instances, was the offence, mine alone be the punishment.’

“ ‘ Agreed!’ said the King, with a smile, which for once was unequivocal ; ‘ but first rise, my Lord Bishop, and learn from me that which experience has made me capable of teaching. Touching spiritual matters, I will always defer to your better judgment ; but, with regard to temporal ones, know, O Bishop of Segovia, that actions in themselves are nothing, it is the *result* that stamps them either with right or wrong.* Your disobedience, in this instance,

* I beg leave to say, that this axiom was Philip the Second of Spain's,—not mine ; but judging from daily and hourly events, most of the world seem to be perfectly of his Majesty's way of thinking.

has spared us an endless remorse ; but as all acts of 'lese Majesté' should be commemorated, this one shall be enrolled among our archives, by our giving you a golden chess-board, the bishops of which shall be likenesses of yourself, and the knights a resemblance of the Prince of Calatrava, who, as he was a participator in your disobedience, should also be embraced in our mode of signalizing it,' added Philip, opening his arms to receive Don Gusman ; ' but,' continued he, now linking his arm within that of the Prince, ' though our loyal and trusty friend here has escaped the scaffold, we by no means intend restoring him to liberty ; on the contrary, it is our pleasure, that to-morrow he espouse, in the presence of our whole court, the Donna Estella d'Ossuna ; and now, Señors, to supper—my Lord Bishop, your arm !' And the King thus leaning on the Prince of Calatrava and Ruy Lopez, we followed into supper."

" Such, señors, is the real history of the elevation of Ruy Lopez," said the stranger, as soon as Don Silvas y Mendez had ceased speaking.

“ May I take the liberty of asking, Señor,” said the latter, “ how it happens that you, (though I do not remember to have had the pleasure of meeting you before, at least certainly not at the Escorial the night Ruy Lopez was made Bishop of Segovia), who seem to be so accurately acquainted with all the details of the Prince of Calatrava’s narrow escape, yet in parts of your narration made use of the expressions *he seemed to be asking*; for instance, in the dungeon, you said—‘ Calavar demanded his prey, who, it *was evident*, petitioned for a further reprieve.’ Now, from this, one might be lead to suppose an impossibility—namely, that though you had been an eye-witness to the whole scene, you had heard nothing ?”

“ Nevertheless, that is precisely the fact, señor,” replied the stranger, coldly, as he measured Don Silvas with his eye from head to foot.

The latter, who was by no means slightly imbued with the superstition of the times, and was, moreover, a Castilian, involuntarily backed his seat a few paces, and the next minute suddenly discovering that he had been an immense

time at table, shook Ignatius by the hand, bowed to the stranger, and made a precipitate retreat into the gardens, where the music had been for a long time playing, and crowds were now assembled. Effectively, on looking round, the Jesuit perceived that he, Salinas, and the stranger, had the room to themselves,—so long had they sat, and so interested had they been, in listening to and reciting the history of Ruy Lopez's bishopric and the Prince of Calatrava's escape. But Ignatius now rose, and proposed adjourning to the gardens—continuing, however, to walk by the side of the stranger, whose face he was convinced he had seen before meeting him that day at the Louvre, and whose whole manner, coupled with his last strange reply to Don Silvas's question, so raised his curiosity and excited his interest, that he determined to find out who he was, before they parted. On reaching the gardens, therefore, he seated Salinas in an arbour, who preferred listening to a natural concert of nightingales, to mingling with the crowd, whose merry faces he could not see. Promising to return to him, Ignatius walked on with the stranger through

a grove of fragrant lime-trees, whose sombre shade had been deserted by the more youthful frequenters of the 'Mille feuilles' for its sunny 'tapis verts'—where, to judge by their ever-springing freshness, the fairies appeared to trip it all night, and repair, by their flower-creating steps, the crushing they had received from more substantial feet by day.

"I think, señor, I saw you at the Louvre to-day!" said the Jesuit.

"Nothing more likely, for I was there," was the laconic reply.

"Do you make any stay in Paris?"

"No—I leave it to-morrow night—and you, padre—?"

"And I also leave it to-morrow; perhaps we may travel the same road. Are you for Italy?"

Without heeding this latter question, the stranger replied, more as if he were thinking aloud—"No, you won't leave it to-morrow; not till the day after; for Catherine de Medici's letters for Florence will not be ready till then."

Ignatius stared; but he merely replied, "Pardon me, signor, I have the Queen's commands to depart at break of day to-morrow."

“Aye,” rejoined the stranger, who continued to walk with his hands behind his back, and to talk in the same careless, mild, yet decided, tone that he had done all along,—“Aye, to escort the Marquis de Millepropos to his Norman castle; but, on reaching your hostelry you will find another order to await the Queen’s dispatches till the day after to-morrow.”

The Jesuit now stared in good earnest. Who could this extraordinary being be, who seemed to know every one, and every thing? Yet there was nothing unusual in his appearance, beyond the remarkable paleness and beauty of his features, and the extreme richness, yet plainness, of his black velvet dress; the vivid purple of the taffeta that lined his cloak, the large brilliant in each rosette of his shoes, and the peculiarly fine water of the diamonds that clasped in the black plumes of his hat.

Just as Ignatius was on the point of boldly asking him his name, by came the Marquis de Millepropos, with drawn rapier, thrusting at the unresisting trees, and singing,

" Tirilerila ! tirilerila !

**" Hélas ! parmi tant de si beaux yeux,
Pour me mettre bien sur à l'abri,
Il faut à quelques-uns faire mes adieux,
Car me partager je ne puis !"**

" ' Trève, Monsieur le Marquis ! ' " cried the stranger, backing so as to avoid coming in contact with that illustrious personage's hostile weapon.

" Ah, illustrissimo Signor Margini ! how fares it with you ? As for me, I am already so ' blasé ' with Paris and the endless jealousies, rivalries, plots, and counterplots of the women, that I am off for Normandy to-morrow. Do you often come here ? Of course you have heard of this little fracas of mine at court ? Oh, those women ! those women ! I went to De Retz afterwards, to ask him if some malicious person—the Prince de Condé, perhaps,—had not been rousing Catherine's jealousy against me, by telling her of some of my ' amourettes ' at Venice ? but it was evident something had gone wrong with the Maréchal, for he was by no means in the best of all possible humours ; and what do you think ? he had the impertinence to call me a fool ! But adieu,—au revoir ! " And the ex-

ambassador pursued his way, waging war with the trees, and singing that charming ‘refrain’ of his own composition,—

“Hélas ! parmi tant de si beaux yeux,
Pour me mettre bien sur à l’abri ;
Il faut à quelques-uns faire mes adieux,
Car me partager je ne puis !”

“ I marvel the Signor Magini,—since I find it is that celebrated personage whom I have the honour of addressing,”—said Ignatius, “should not have let that insufferable ‘freluquet,’ the Marquis de Millepros, know in plain French his opinion of him.”

“ You know, padre,” replied Magini, “ that when the Florentines play their favourite game of pallone, they always strike the big balls with a guarded arm. Mankind strongly resemble pallone balls,—as the direction of both greatly depends upon those from whom they receive their impetus : and the *follies* of the one, as well as the *follies* of the other, require equally to be struck with a guarded arm, if the striker would not entail a rebound on himself.”

“ I believe you are right, signor,” said the Jesuit, “ but now that I have discovered who

you are, will you allow me to consult you professionally, at any hour that may suit your convenience? say to-morrow: as you tell me I am not to quit Paris till the day after."

"Impossible!" replied Magini, taking a glass of Nérolî* from a grisette, who was handing that and other beverages about; "impossible! for I have three appointments to-night; and to-morrow I shall be all day at the Louvre. But before we part,—now, on the spot,—I can tell you what you wish to know: You have two great objects in life,—the first, revenge against the heads of the Venetian nobles, and the Cappello family, for the part they took in your brother's imprisonment, some years ago; the second, the attaining to a cardinal's hat: this latter you will obtain through the medium of Bianca Cappello,—and beware how you include her in your hatred of the rest of her family, for through her aggrandisement will ultimately come your revenge on the Venetian nobles!"

"Pardon me, signor, if I observe," said

* A sort of essence extracted from oranges, much in vogue at that time, stronger than modern orange-flower water, diluted and drank with sugar.

Ignatius, much astonished at Magini's accurate knowledge of his long-cherished but most secret feelings ; " Pardon me if I observe that I do not see how Bianca Cappello can rise any higher in the scale of degraded aggrandisement than she has done,—for, though her influence over Francesco de Medici increases daily, yet he can scarcely carry his folly so far as to brave the court of Austria, by repudiating Joan ; and, if he did, the Pope would never consent to the scandal of a double divorce, to facilitate his marriage with Bianca."

" And think you not," replied Magini, while a cold smile flitted over his pale, still features, like moonlight over a monumental statue ; " think you not that Fate can grant more effectual divorces than the Pope ! Bonaventuri's days are already numbered ; and Time, which is Fate's prime minister, will do the rest. But the sun is now setting, and I have business out at the abbey of St. Denis ; so farewell, padre,—and if you would arrive at the goal of your wishes, *spare Bianca Cappello !* "

" Farewell, signor ! " echoed the Jesuit, who,

wishing to obtain some clue to the astrologer's movements, added, "May I hope that, when we meet again, it will be among the peaceful vineyards of Tuscany?"

"See you yon faint red streak in the sky, just above the evening star?" asked Magini, pointing upwards as he spoke.

"Yes; what of it?" said Ignatius.

"That portends wars, and rumours of wars. The next time we meet it will be amid the blood and carnage of the battle-field."

And, so saying, Magini turned down an avenue, and disappeared.

"Strange! most strange!" said Ignatius, aloud; "what should bring either him or me amid the slaughter of war? However, my faith in all the rest will be confirmed, or shaken, by my finding, or not finding, the Queen's counter-order for the journey into Normandy to-morrow, on my return to the hostelry." And so saying, Ignatius returned to the harbour where he had left Salinas; and giving him his arm, quitted the gardens of the 'Mille feuilles.' After conducting Salinas to his lodgings, near Nôtre Dame, he retraced, with a quickened pace, his

steps to his inn, the 'Bon Roy Dagobert,' in the Rue de la Pomme d'Or.

Immediately under the sign of his inn sat Claude Pajon, the aubergiste, shelling beans, an occupation from which he however desisted on the approach of the Jesuit, in order to present him with a letter sealed with the royal arms, which had been brought, as he said, by a court page. Ignatius tore it open,—it was a command to dine at the Louvre on the following day, and not to quit Paris till the day after, as Catherine de Medici's letters for Florence were not ready.

CHAPTER IV.

“Elle ne put souffrir de perdre une conquête si glorieuse. Combien de femmes n’y a-t-il pas qui pensent de même qu’elle, et qui ne ressentent la perte d’un amant, que par la douleur, et le dépit que souffre leur amour-propre?”

**LETTRES CABALISTIQUES DU SEIZIÈME SIÈCLE,
ENTRE ABUKILLAK, ET BEN KIBER.**

CAUSES are so linked together in this world, that our free-will is only available at the outset of our career. Well may it be said, “Ce n’est que le premier pas qui coûte,” in more senses than one; for *one* false step, or wrong act, so thoroughly subverts the mechanism of our very nature, that independence even of thought becomes a chimera, and instead of being able to overcome circumstances, they master us. One error places the events of a whole life in a false juxtaposition; effects and results compel our actions; but had we not, either through folly or crime, given a wrong

impetus to, or created causes, such effects and such results would never have ensued. Nobody is *obliged* to run down a steep mountain ; but once let him begin, and the power of stopping becomes impossible, consequently the choice of doing so no longer rests with him. Bianca felt this bitterly, in the headlong and downward career on which she had entered ; nay, she felt more, for she had arrived at that climax of mortal anguish, the living to regret ; having replaced the honest sorrows which made her the victim, by the crimes which wrecked, but could not avenge. The prosperity which Cosimo Primo's sinewy and industrious policy had bequeathed to Tuscany, was every day dwindling into additional impotence, and the people succumbing under the exhaustion of heavy imposts and taxation, which drained them without lightening the enormous debt with which the state was burdened, under the luxury, indolence, extravagance, and misrule of Francesco de Medici, who cared little how those at home murmured, or those abroad threatened, as long as the rose-leaves of his own sybarite existence remained uncrumpled. But the re-

monstrances and discontent of his brothers, from which he could not escape, annoyed and provoked him seriously; for instead of producing the salutary effect of arousing him from the disgraceful and destructive moral lethargy into which he was plunged, all expostulations on their part only served to widen the breach between them, and make the Grand Duke lament incessantly, that having had no children by his wife, his brother, the Cardinal, must become his heir; this source of discontent at length became a positive 'monomania' with him, and he was always repeating to Bianca that he was the most miserable of men; for that had he even an illegitimate son, he would soon legitimize him, and proclaim him his heir; for he had but one object, that of defeating the ambition of his brothers. It was therefore, with regret and dismay, that she beheld his daily increasing gloom and dejection, which even she, it appeared, had lost the art of dissipating. Her disquietude arose, not from the fear of losing his affections (for, for those she had never cared), but from the dread of not being able to retain her empire over him;—for having in a fatal

moment deviated from the narrow right path (in which even for the most unfortunate, there are always some green spots, and some fair prospects, however distant), she had set her fate upon *one* cast, and if she lost that, she lost *all*. Fearful indeed is the void which our uprooted affections leave, and which no ambition, however high, or however wide, can fill ; for the heart is no phoenix, and never rises again from its own ashes ;—but from those ashes there rise, at most, vague and unsubstantial phantoms, which flit through the poor ruin, and serve only to haunt and goad the memory that still survives. Where once the tempter has entered in, he but too easily finds a readmission. Infected by Francesco's constant regrets, and alarmed by his reiterated assurances, that rather than his brothers should succeed him, he would bequeath the Duchy of Tuscany to an illegitimate son, Bianca began to wish as ardently as he could do, that she might be the mother of the future Grand Duke ; but despairing of being so in reality, once, and only once, the dark idea crossed her mind of substituting the child of some peasant, whose

poverty might be tempted by money to abandon it ; but she instantly rejected this thought as base and unworthy. Although she never again, even to herself, would own that such an idea had crossed her mind ; yet, in spite of herself, the unacknowledged substance of it preyed upon her, and banished sleep from her eyes, and bloom from her cheek, till at length Francesco began to remark her altered looks, with (as her quick fears thought) less of tenderness than vexation.

She was one day sitting alone in a subterranean grotto or cavern (which still exists as it then was), in the Villa Strozzi, somewhat more dejected than usual, for the Duke had not been for two whole days,—an eternity, according to their former intercourse—every change in which, however trifling, made her tremblingly suspect that she was tottering to her fall ; and never having been well since her father's death, everything, however trivial in itself, affected her strongly.

“ Yes,” said she, in answer to her own thoughts, as she leant on a rustic table, and sat opposite to the wax figure of a mimic hermit,

whose glass eyes were devoutly fixed on a large open volume before him, while apparently he had achieved the miracle of making time stand still, as the sands never slipped through the hour-glass, which, with a human skull and the book before him, completed all his chattles, —“ Yes, it is evident he loves me no longer ! If I were starving, no doubt I should have plenty of children ; see that poor blind child Ugolino, how he has lived on through everything,—but had his parents had a kingdom to leave him, no doubt he would have been sickly, died young, or perhaps never have been born, —what would I not give that even that poor blind orphan were my son !”

It is a sad truth, but true as sad, that our bad thoughts or evil intentions are seldom without some fostering aid to bring them to maturity, while, alas ! our good ones have no such ministering angels. No, no, they are nouns-substantive, and stand alone in that metaphysical grammar, called *the mind*. Bianca had scarcely uttered the last wish, before the leaves of the book before the hermit were violently stirred, as with a sudden current of air. On raising

her eyes, when startled by this sound, she beheld rising, as her distempered imagination thought, out of the earth, just behind the figure of the hermit, the hideous apparition of Giovannina Neri, whom she had not seen since the day she had released her from prison. The hag had the same blackthorn stick that she had stumped about with in the podesta, and her wardrobe seemed by no means improved. Her coarse gray hair was not concealed by the decent shelter of either coif or hat, but stood up in a sort of pyramidal maze.

“It is your own fault, bellissima, if you do not play the part of mother to a fairer child than ever Ugolino was, or ever will be,” said Giovannina, as she advanced towards Bianca, rubbing her skinny hands and lighting up her distorted features with an appalling grin.

“What mean you, gossip?” asked Bianca.

“I know it all,” replied the hag, approaching more nearly, and lowering her voice, “all Francesco de Medici’s discontent at having no son, and all your griefs and fears at such being the case. But your fears are at the wrong side; you fear to do that which would end all fear:

But, cheer up, long before you were born it was decreed that I should come to your assistance at this crisis. Aye! you stare, and in your heart you marvel,—but leave both staring and marvelling, and *listen*. That you may know I do not speak at random, I'll tell you who I was, and what I am. I was nurse to the Signorina Ferrai, and continued living with the poor child after she had the misfortune to make, what her friends considered, such a fine match; that is, after she became the wife of Martin Bernardini's brother;—poor youth—I mean the Signor Carlo Benardini, for he was fair and open as a May morning, and doted on his wife. But in some families that is a crime, though not one that gentlemen of his rank are often guilty of. Be that as it may, his love for the signora was wormwood to his brother Martin, who could not get him to enter into any of his own ambitious schemes, and who never forgave him for marrying, what he called, so much below him; though, heaven knows, the Signora Arianna was good enough for the Grand Duke himself, much less for the Gonfaloniere's younger brother. However, when

Martin Bernardini found that neither threats nor bribes could turn Signor Carlo from his quiet home, his anger grew to hatred, and his hatred to revenge ; the first symptom of which was his sudden civility to me : not a holiday occurred, but I was sure to receive some present from the Gonfaloniere. These presents, which were at first Hebrew to me, soon became translated pretty plainly, by his asking me to do him the favour of poisoning his brother. Nothing, he said, could be so easy as for me to mingle with his wine a certain Ethiopian fluid that he would give me, one drop of which was sufficient to render deadly a whole flask of wine ; and that this poison differed from all others, inasmuch as that detection was impossible, as it left no trace, not even the slightest, externally or internally on the victims ; for which reason it had received the name of the *inscrutable* among those conversant in poisons. He further added, that the Borgias had used it with impunity for years, and that it was not until they had taken to the use of that vulgar drug, arsenic, that they ever were detected. I listened to the wretch thus far from a stupe-

faction of horror, that deprived me of all power of utterance ; but, at length recovering myself, I rejected his vile proposal with scorn, poured on him a torrent of indignation, and flung him back his ill-omened gifts.

“ But I might have spared myself the trouble, for shortly after my young master was murdered. He was scarcely cold in his untimely grave—I was ill in bed, and my poor mistress within three months of her confinement—when I remember one night, towards midnight, some masked bravos—emissaries no doubt of Martin Bernardini—entered the house and forcibly carried off my dear young mistress, who was sitting by my bed-side. I screamed ; and, springing from the bed, opposed my feeble struggles against the four masked ruffians, who were armed to the teeth. You may imagine how ineffectual was such a resistance. From that fatal night I never beheld my poor foster-child more. From all I can gather, my illness ended in a brain fever ; but when I recovered my bodily strength (for at times my head wandered), I found myself stretched on my own bed, in my own cottage, with my brother-in-

law (for I was at that time a widow), who was a poor 'contadino,' and Isolina, his wife, attending me. Though I dared not openly express my hatred of Martin Bernardini—for *power* is the most dangerous edged tool that the friendless and the poor can meddle with—yet I became consumed with a burning desire for *revenge*! I wandered about under the influence of this feeling, like one possessed, and incapable of doing any thing. At length, as if to open to me a vista of hope, I heard marvels of the skill of a great astrologer and soothsayer, one Signor Magini. I went to him, and he told me it would be years before I should have my revenge on the Gonfaloniere, and then|that it would be more a prospect of thwarting some of his designs, than an ample revenge. He assured me, however, that Martin Bernardini had not actually murdered my mistress, neither was she then dead; but that he had forced on her a second marriage, of so revolting a nature, that it would be the cause of her death; but where she was, or to whom she was married, he positively refused to tell me. But now comes my revenge! and my

triumph!—aye, and *your* triumph, too, Bianca,—for he told me that it was to be a grandson of *mine* that would be selected to be the future Grand Duke of Tuscany, though *not* as my grandson, but as the reputed son of Francesco de Medici (mark you, at that time Cosimo Primo still reigned); and throwing into two silver braziers a powder, which caused a most fragrant odour, but dense vapour, Magini withdrew a dark curtain from before a large mirror, and bade me behold the lady for whose son my grandson should pass: when lo! I beheld you—you, Lady Bianca—as plainly as I now behold you; though you could not, at that time, have been more than a year old, if so much. I then importuned him to know where and when I should meet with you? He would not tell me the exact time,—but he told me it would not be for many years, and that I should first see you in a prison,—and was it not so? ha! ha! ‘bellina!’” continued the old woman, seeing Bianca’s unfeigned astonishment. “Now you begin to believe! now you see, that Giovannina Neri is neither mad nor a witch!—though I have twice been subjected to

the ordeal for witchcraft ; three times banished from Tuscany ; and twice imprisoned on suspicion of the same. But the prisons were my paradise ! for in them I always had the hope of meeting you ; and you see I was not disappointed. For the rest, I passed my time in telling fortunes, or living upon the credulity of others, which gained me the reputation of a sorceress. I say the credulity of others, for I had no real knowledge ; I had not, like Magini, learnt creation by heart. Nevertheless, my renown was great ; and among the most constant of my votaries was the late Marchesa Strozzi. Poor soul ! many a time and oft has she met me, at noon and at night, in this very grotto ; and many a time have I, when hunted almost to the death, taken refuge from my persecutors in the caverns of this villa, whose every winding I know as well as the lineaments of my own child. But now I must return to you : ever since the day that you released me from the Podesta, I have haunted this grotto, where alone I could behold you without being seen,—for your face was to me like a vision of heaven ; not so much from its beauty, wondrous

as that is, as from its being the bright impersonation of the glorious dream of many years. It is as if the flowers (for what else are our fair but perishable hopes?) which I had cast upon life's stream in youth, had miraculously returned to me in age, as fresh and as sweet as when they and I were both in our spring——But, tush! What have I to do with tears?" said the old woman, brushing one away with the back of her withered hand, "I shed them all——all—to the very last, when Arianna and her husband died; for I knew I should never want them again; nor have I,—and less now than ever: for we should laugh!—for are we not going to win? For years, like all those who are too wretched, I felt that I had no fate: for I had an existence without a life,—and it is only in life that there is destiny. But I have resuscitated, to learn the truth of the saying, that God never effaces but to re-write; and now I, even I, live again! and have a career before me. For months I have been an invisible auditor of Francesco de Medici's lamentations at being childless; but it was only yesterday that my youngest daughter announced to me,

with tears in her eyes, that she was again about to become a mother. Being wretchedly poor, and not having had a child for fifteen years,—since the birth of poor Beppo,—the lame boy, whom you saw under my window the day you visited the prison,—she is wonderfully afflicted at the circumstance. But not so I, who know the great destiny of this unborn child. And now do you see what you have to do?” asked Giovannina.

“Not exactly,” said Bianca, pale and trembling, while her blood seemed curdling into ice in her veins.

“Then, by the Madonna! you are duller than I thought you,” rejoined the hag; “but as you do not know your lesson, I will teach it to you. You have not now to learn that the Cardinal de Medici hates you; but perhaps you may not be aware that Martin Bernardini is his bosom friend and adviser, and that in no one point are they so unanimous as upon the expediency of achieving your downfall;—and take care that they have not already advanced far towards it! The wrongs of the Grand Duchess, on the one hand, is a fair and plausible

motive for their dislike, to place before the public,—for men never lack virtuous labels, or just cause, for all the evil they do. On the other, an affected sympathy with the disappointment of the Duke at having no heir ; and the constant hints of Martin Bernardini (for the Cardinal of course keeps clear of that scandal), that with another mistress he might be more fortunate, cannot fail, in time, to produce their effect. Now do you see what you should do ?”

“ No,” said Bianca, faintly ; as if the thought that, by making every suggestion come from her strange counsellor, she could lessen the crime of her acceding to them ; which the old woman’s last insidious allusions to the Cardinal’s hatred of, and machinations against, her, had made her more than ever inclined to do.

“ No ! again,—’tis incomprehensible, that so keen a wit should be so suddenly blunted by that which should whet it most—its own interest. But now let us reverse the medal ; think you that all the Cardinal’s sermons, or the Gonfaloniere’s hints, would weigh one feather with the Duke, if you were to place within his arms an heir to all his greatness ? Your silence

gives the proper answer, they could not. You have only then to announce to him to-day, or the next time you see him, the joyous intelligence, that in six months from this, his fondest hopes will be realized; and then *your reign* will be more triumphant, and more secure than ever."

"But—but—" at length faltered Bianca, seeing that Giovannina paused for her reply; "supposing—mind I only say *supposing*—that I were to accede to so wild a scheme, how can you be sure that your daughter will have a son?"

"How can I be sure that the sun shines? or that I am now speaking to you? but as sure as I am of these facts, so am I of the other; at all events, you need not alarm yourself on that score, for you have only to make the announcement to the Duke, and I will take care to enable you to fulfil your promise."

The tempter had triumphed, as he always does when he is listened to.

"But this Signor Magini, that you mentioned, could I not first see and consult him?"

"Impossible! he is away at the court of

France, for the Queen Catherine de Medici sets great store by his predictions, as well she may."

"Did he positively say," asked Bianca, her finger still pressed upon her lip, as if deliberating, which, according to good authority, is always the prelude to a woman's being lost, "did he positively that your grandson *would be Duke of Tuscany?*"

"The exact words that I before repeated to you, were, that *he would be chosen to be Grand Duke of Tuscany*, and that is the same thing."

"Not quite," thought Bianca, as she sat racked between the conflicting vacillations of hope and fear, the lingering virtue that pleaded for the right, and the subtle devil that goaded to the wrong.

Five minutes passed, and still the fair Venetian was silent.

"Come, come!" said the hag, in a hoarse voice, striking her ragged black-thorn staff impatiently on the ground, "your answer!"

"Only give me till to-morrow," said Bianca.

“ Now, or never !” interrupted Giovannina, in a voice that seemed to rend the very rocks of the cavern.

Before Bianca could reply, she heard the Duke’s well-known whistle, for it was the fashion of the day to wear whistles in the form of small silver birds, and whenever Francesco could not find her in the house, he always sought her in the grounds, or the grotto, announcing his arrival by the voice of his silver herald.

“ Go, for heaven’s sake !—here is the Duke,” cried she.

“ I do not stir from this without my errand,” said the old woman sternly, sinking, however, down behind the high-backed chair, which, with the hermit’s dress, completely concealed her.

She had scarcely ensconced herself in this retreat, before Ghiriluzzo entered, announcing the Grand Duke ; which he had no sooner done than he quitted the grotto.

“ It is an age since I have seen you,” said Francesco, listlessly, as if, at all events, it had been a very peaceful age to him.

Bianca, somewhat piqued at the indifferent tone in which this was said, replied rather coldly: "And whose the fault, my lord?"

"Not mine—I was harassed to death yesterday, and the day before, with that eternal Spanish American loan; and then Ferdinando is always pulling the Vatican about my ears; and then my worthy subjects are as sulky as bears, and as hard to please as a wife!"

"And to-day, 'caro mio,' for it is now late, have you been equally occupied to-day?"

"Why—yes, but somewhat more pleasantly, it must be confessed; for Martin Bernardini took me to see a young Roman beauty, who has just arrived—Laura Colonna—and, certes, for once report is no liar, for she is passing fair. But how pale you look, Bianca; you have often looked so of late. I wish you would try the baths of Monte Cattino, or those of Lucca;—do dearest!"

There was in these last words of the Duke that combination of inflammable atoms, which, when they fall upon such combustible matter as suspicion and jealousy, instantly produce such dire and tremendous results, as no ordi-

nary causes, however great, can achieve. The torch had now been put to the previously laid train, in Bianca's mind, and the fire must have its way, even though she herself should be its first victim. Francesco de Medici had been to see Laura Colonna, and she was beautiful,—that was the first, great and apparent peril: then *she* was looking ill, and had *often done so of late* (he need not have laid such a discordant stress on the words); this was the second disagreeable fact in the Duke's speech: but the poison, that was, as it generally is, in the dregs of the cup—he wished she would go to the baths of Lucca or Monte Cattino; no doubt that he might bestow his then vacant time on the beautiful Laura Colonna! This was decisive; the evil one had gained the victory, and Bianca turned her now crimson face away from the man whom she at that moment almost fancied she loved, so great was the pain it gave her to deceive him, or so great the fear of losing him.

“ I have looked ill for some time,” she stammered out, as she hid her face upon the Duke's shoulder; “ but—but you will not be sorry to

hear that there is a cause for it. In six months, perhaps, you may have all you wish, and then you will not mind my ill looks,—will you, caro?”

Here Giovannina, from her hiding-place, could not repress a short cachinnatory symptom of triumphant joy!

“What on earth was that?” cried the Duke, stopping suddenly short in the expressions of delight and affection he was going to give utterance to at this announcement of Bianca.

“Oh nothing, love, but the cry of one of the innumerable colony of owls and bats that inhabit this cave.”

Too happy in the intelligence he had just heard to give the strange noise a second thought, Francesco de Medici fondly passed his arm round Bianca’s waist to lead her into the sunshine, as he said, “You must not indeed, dearest, you must not pass so much of your time in this damp grotto. Remember, I forbid it! Oh, dear—dearest Bianca—if you only knew how happy you have made me!”—

“And what style of beauty is Laura Colonna?” asked Bianca, gathering a handful of

myrtle blossoms as she passed, and burying her face in them, while she fixed her eyes on the Duke.

“ Oh ! never mind Laura Colonna ;—fair—no, dark. Upon my word I forget—that is, I scarcely remarked her.”

“ What ! and yet you discovered that she was so beautiful !”

“ Well, I was wrong. There’s no one beautiful but my own Bianca.” And then, pursuing his own thoughts aloud, he added, “ I shall like to see Ferdinando’s and the Gonfaloniere’s faces when I tell them of it.”

When they reached the house, the Duke’s pages inquired if he was ready for his horses ?

“ No, they may be put up. I shall sup here to-night,” he replied.

“ I think your Highness forgets that you promised to honour the Gonfaloniere with your company at supper to-night,” said the page.

“ Let him know that I have changed my mind, and that I have business to transact with him at nine to-morrow morning.”

“ And also inform him,” added Bianca, with somewhat of the arrogance, and not a

little of the assurance of her newly-regained and much increased power, "that *I* should like a military mass in Santa Croce to-morrow."

"Don't forget," cried the Duke, calling after the page, "that the Signora would like a military mass at Santa Croce, to-morrow."

From that day, the more numerous and extraordinary were the whims and requests of Bianca Cappello, the more pleased was Francesco de Medici.

CHAPTER V.

"We ransack tombs for pastime ; from the dust
 Call up the sleeping hero ; bid him tread
 The scene for our amusement." YOUNG.

——— "On le verra dans ma péroration.
 Sur ce fameux combat jusque-là je me joue ;
 Mais naturellement tout cela se dénoue,
 Et je viens à mon fait."

LES VENDANGES, *par Regnard.*

TOWARDS the close of a crisp autumnal evening, on the seventh day from their leaving Paris, Ignatius Dragoni, a royal guard of two hundred Swiss, the Marquis de Millepropos, his valet, barber (for at that time these offices were performed by separate functionaries), his 'chef,' 'confesseur,' 'boulangier,' sumpter mules and pack-horses (as in those days 'fourgons' were not), approached the small town of Dreux, in Normandy.

"I think, Monsieur le Marquis," said the

Jesuit, who was riding beside him, “notwithstanding the red glare of the sky towards the west, the clouds are very black over the hills, and promise us a good drenching if we push on to the Château de Quillac to-night, as it is full twelve leagues further. What say you? Shall we advance and meet the storm, or seek the hospitality of the village inn? Mine host of the ‘Bon Roy D’Agobert’ at Paris assured me that I should not find a better hostelry in Dreux than ‘l’auberge du Chante Poulet, kept by his brother, Pierre Pajon.”

“Parbleu! je le crois,” said the Marquis; “inasmuch as there is no other. Diable! what was that?” cried he, as a heavy booming sound rolled through the air.

“It must have been distant thunder,” replied Ignatius.

“Then that decides the question in favour of the Chante-Poulet at once,” said the Marquis. “But listen! there it is again: by the helmet of Mars it is cannon and not thunder. Ho, friend!” added he, reining in his horse, and addressing a peasant who sat crying by the

road-side, and who, by his hat, was evidently a Huguenot, "what is the meaning of this cannonading in this quiet little town?"

"Quiet, indeed!" rejoined the peasant, "is it possible, seigneur, that you have not heard of the dreadful battle fought at Dreux to-day? the Maréchal de Saint-André, they say, is killed! and the Prince de Condé and Duc de Montmorenci are taken prisoners. So now it is all up with us, since the Duc de Guise has gained the victory; and I am only waiting here till some one comes and tells me whether my son, who is a soldier in the army of the Prince de Condé (God bless him! though he is a prisoner) is killed."

"Non, mon père, me voilà sain et sauf!" said a young man, clearing the hedge as he spoke, but with his cuirass much bulged, and a sabre wound across his forehead, from which the blood was streaming, and which his handkerchief, that he had tucked under his helmet, was insufficient to staunch; "but alas! our brave Prince is taken; however, they have allowed him the attendance of two of his own

soldiers, and, thank Heaven ! I am one of the two ; so now that I have seen you, father, I must be gone."

" Mercy on me, François, but you are wounded !" exclaimed the father, as soon as he had disengaged himself from the embrace of his son.

" Pooh ! a mere scratch, that the *Sieur Fernel*,* who is with our army, will soon make as fair as a lady's hand, though I am of opinion that it is no honourable wound gained in battle, but merely my mother's attempt to eat me when she saw me safe," said the young soldier, as he laughingly wrung the blood from his handkerchief.

" So," said the peasant, with a somewhat mortified look, " though you promised if God spared your life, to come to me the moment the battle was over, yet you went to your mother first ?"

" I did, father, because she was my mother ; so, vive le Prince de Condé !" said the young

* Fernel was surgeon and physician to Henry the Second of France, and wrote a celebrated treatise, entitled "*De abditis Rerum Causis*."

soldier, shaking his father by the hand, and preparing again to clear the hedge.

“Un moment, mon brave,” said the Marquis de Millepropos, who, amid all his folly, had had too much good feeling to interrupt this little scene between the father and son; “one moment,”—and he placed in the soldier’s hand two gold pieces. “I think you said the Duc de Guise had gained the victory? I rejoice at it: for he is not only a staunch Catholic, but a particular friend of mine.”

“Is he so, seigneur,” said the young man, flinging down the two gold pieces that the Marquis had given him; “then all I can say is, that I despise your friend as much as your gold:” and the next moment the soldier was out of sight.

“Ventre bleu! but your son is a bear, old fellow,” cried the Marquis, turning to the peasant; and then putting spurs to his horse. But the guard soon called after him to halt, as their horses were too tired to keep pace with him. This slow mode of proceeding brought them to sunset before they reached the outskirts of the town, which seemed enveloped in

a flame-coloured mantle, lined with black, from the red glare of the setting sun, amid a funereal procession of dark clouds. Before they entered the town, they had to traverse some large 'prés,' or meadow lands ; but prior to reaching them, the air was impregnated with a strong smell of gunpowder, and a hazy sort of flitting vapour, which set the horses of the troopers snorting, neighing, and pawing the earth. A short turn in the road soon brought them before the frightful cause of these effects : for it brought them to the field where one of the most sanguinary battles of those terrible civil wars had that day been fought. The further end of the field was still so enveloped in the steam of human life, and the smoke of that which had terminated it, as to render all that was passing there invisible at a short distance ; but above the groans of the wounded and the dying, rose the rumbling sound of the heavy artillery, as it was with difficulty driven off the spongy ground, that was saturated with blood. Here might be seen a dead Catholic, with a monk holding a crucifix to his cold lips ; and there a dying Huguenot, with a clergyman

praying beside him ;—while, on all sides, were hecatombs of horses. Here and there, seated on a cannon, were armourers, hammering on bulged greaves and breast plates, as calmly as if they had been pursuing their avocations in their own workshops. The evening was now closing in,—so, in addition to these groups, there began to flit about, with quick, yet stealthy, movements, those human vultures who prey upon the dead, and carry on their sepulchral pillage amid carnage and blood. But above all the mournful and murmuring sounds of the ensanguined field, arose the distant, clear, compact echoes of the cavalry, on their way through the town to their different barracks, or billets. The Jesuit's mule, unused to such scenes and sounds, had given such unequivocally refractory symptoms of his decided objection to proceeding any further, that his master thought it best to dismount and lead it. Ignatius still encountered one almost insurmountable obstacle to his progression, in the slimy and slippery state the ground was in, from the gore with which it had been deluged. Though by no means made of

the most "penetrable stuff," yet, as his sandals sunk into the earth, there was something awfully revolting in thus wading ankle deep through blood. And, as the flushed clarions of the trumpet of victory sounded from the headquarters of the Duc de Guise's army, and found its truest echoes in the groans of the dying and the lamentations of the living, he could not help saying to himself, "And is it of necessity that the tissue of happiness, or of success, woven for one half mankind, must ever be woofed with the misery or the subjugation of the other half?"

But his reverie was interrupted by a soliloquy from the Marquis de Millepropos, who had reined in his horse, to prevent its trampling the corse of the Maréchal de Saint André.

"Poor Saint André! so there you lie! and a braver never died, nor ever lived. I little thought, when I gave your son good advice, about a week ago, at that 'poltron' of a court, from which I am now about to retire in disgust, that he would so soon have to act his father's part,—that is to fill your place. 'Mais la vie,

c'est une énigme, dont la mort nous apprend le mot.' "

" Really, Monsieur le Marquis," said Ignatius, with a look of astonishment, " that last remark of yours is as true as it is profound."

" Very possibly, mon père, but it is not mine. I heard it from the lips of a worthy curé, in the only sermon I ever went to since I have come to years of discretion ; and see the good of not overloading one's mind with discourses of that nature ; I have remembered it ; and not liking to be totally unprovided with something pious and consolatory, whenever a death occurred in the family of any of my friends I have always applied it ; and, finding it so successful on one melancholy occasion, I thought it might serve another : so, when any young man, about my own age, sacrifices himself in marriage, I always say to him ' Ecoutez, mon ami, l'amour c'est un énigme, dont le mariage nous apprendra le mot ; mais ce n'est pas un bon mot.' Adieu, my dear Saint André ! but much as I grieve to part with you, I cannot push my politeness so far as to say that I hope we may soon meet again."

And so saying, the Marquis went through the ceremony of applying his handkerchief to his eyes, and actually observed a decorous silence for the next five minutes, which his companion felt no inclination to break,—but which, however, was broken by the frantic screams of a woman, who, while she knelt with one arm round the neck of a dying soldier, whose head she supported on her knee with the other, endeavoured to ward off the approach of a short burley looking man, muffled in a dark long riding cloak, while she cried in shrill, yet broken accents, “Touch him at your peril,—he is *not* dead; but I will die before you shall loosen one rivet of his armour. Monster! are there not enough dead victims for your rapacity in this wide slaughter-house, without attacking the living?”

“Nonsense, mistress,” said the ruffian, attempting to use force, “it is getting late; and why haggle about five minutes? for I tell you that is the uttermost time he can live—and the devil himself would not give one spark of fire longer purchase for his soul; but as far as any love gauds—such as a hair chain, or a ring

with a heart hid 'neath a posey, that you may have given him—go, you shall have them back, if that's what you want. So come, now don't be unreasonable."

But just as he was about to oppose the force of his sinewy arm to the pale, feeble, and attenuated hand of the wretched woman, Ignatius rushed between them, and felled him to the earth; while the Marquis de Millepropos contented himself with reining in his horse, and exclaiming, while he caressed his beard, "Bravo! tu as bien fait; c'est un homme sauvage, grossier, enfin sans gallanterie!"

Suddenly rising, the man was about to close with the Jesuit, when he started back, exclaiming, "Father of Moses! how like José Agnado!"

"'Nullum simile quod idem est,'* though I doubt that too; for you are more like yourself than ever, *honest* Giovanni Ferrai," said Ignatius; "equally expert at robbing a church or a church-yard; but though dead men tell no tales, *living ones can*. So come, my fine

* Nothing is like that is the same.

fellow, instead of robbing this poor dying man, out with every stiver of your already packed plunder : or I have got a *certain silver key*," added he, in a whisper, " which, with the aid of the inquisition, will help me to your most secret and securely hidden treasures."

At the first mention of the silver key, to say nothing of the inquisition, the Venice goldsmith (for he it was, who, having been appointed jailor over Arianne, at the château de Quillac, by Vittorio Cappello, had taken the opportunity of the battle of Dreux for indulging his thirst for ill-gotten wealth) took to his heels ; not, however before he had fairly turned his pockets inside out ; thereby disburdening them of sundry well filled purses, diamond rings, loops of aigrettes, gold spurs, and aiguillettes.

" Ah, the villain who spoiled my likeness !" said the Marquis, looking after Ferrai, " homme capable de tout !"

" See," said Ignatius to the woman, who had again turned her streaming eyes on the dying soldier, apparently unconscious of all else, now that the annoyance which had threatened him

was over—" See how wisely Providence ordains that out of evil should come good ! Instead of being robbed, you are all this the richer," added he, placing the goldsmith's plunder in her lap.

" Alas ! father," replied the poor woman, bursting into a fresh paroxysm of grief, " I do not want gold—I want what gold cannot buy—hope—life !"

" That, daughter, is in the gift of God alone."

" True," said a voice, which the Jesuit recognized, " true ; but God sometimes bestows the gift through human means,"—and turning round, he beheld Magini. Ignatius started, as he remembered his prediction. His dress was precisely the same as that in which he had last seen him, with the exception of a large-leaved beaver riding hat, and a pair of buff riding boots, with broad roweled gold spurs ; but his rich black velvet cloak and doublet were as new and untravelstained, as if he had been fresh from his toilette, instead of off a journey. Without taking any further notice either of the Jesuit or the Marquis de Millepropes, he knelt

down beside the soldier, and taking from his vest a very small bottle, not larger than a large-sized attar-of-rose flask,—which from its exceeding lustre seemed almost as if it had been made of the abstract brilliancy of the diamond without its solid particles,—he said to the woman, “Don’t despair. Where there is but one spark of life, I have seldom known this remedy to fail.” And, so saying, he loosened the dying man’s helmet, held open his mouth, and took especial care to drop *one* drop, and no more, of the elixir into it. He had no sooner done so, merely allowing for the time that it took him to replace this phial within his vest, and draw a larger bottle from his pocket, than the livid hue of the expiring man’s cheeks was exchanged for a gradually mantling glow of returning life; and the dark blood, which had hitherto seemed to stagnate in “cold obstruction” through the veins of his temples, seemed gently to dissolve into the thin fluid of reviving health, as it glided with a temperate and equal flow through its blue channels. Both the woman and Magini watched these favourable symptoms with suspended respiration, lest, like a newly lit

taper when carried through the air, one breath should extinguish all! But, at length, the man opened his eyes, with a gentle sigh, like a person awaking from sleep, and fixing them on the woman, said—

“ Povera Isolina ! poor Isolina ! ”

But Magini forbid him to speak, and, chafing his temples with some of the contents of the larger bottle, he next steeped some lint in the same, which he placed on the soldier's forehead, who immediately fell into a quiet but natural slumber, while Magini still continued to support the back of his head with his left hand.

“ Your husband, or brother, (which is it, daughter ?) addressed you in Italian,” said Ignatius to the woman, who, though she had not partaken of the elixir, seemed also to have gained additional life.

“ We are Italians, padre—we are Florentines.”

“ Indeed! then, how came you on this field of battle, and engaged in the civil wars of France ? ”

“ Because my husband's father, who is a

vintner, and richer than he was some years ago, never forgave Roberto for marrying me, as he said my grandmother was a witch ; merely because the poor old soul had, in early life, a fever, which at times has disordered her intellects ever since ;—she has been barbarously imprisoned, and hunted three times from Florence by the persecutions of my father-in-law, Cesare Cinti, who led us such a life, that we at length made our escape into France, where, having no means of subsistence, my husband joined the Duke de Guise's army, in which he would this day have died, but for the kind assistance of this charitable gentleman."

" May I ask," said Ignatius, " who was your grandmother ?"

" A poor demented old woman, padre, who had drank of sorrow to the dregs, which often produces madness, but seldom finds toleration : her name was Neri, Giovannina Neri."

" Then by the rood you have some claim on my good offices, daughter ; for I once had the honour of being mistaken for your grandmother, by your amiable father-in-law, Cesare Cinti, who would have bestowed upon me all

the honours of sorcery, such as horse-ponds, hot bars, &c. &c. but for the timely intervention of the Cardinal de Medici, who stood godfather to my identity."

"Then you, padre, are the pilgrim whom Cesare talks of to this day, as being one of my poor grandmother's most diabolical sorceries, which even deceived one of the heads of the church, but could not deceive him!"

"The very same," replied Ignatius.

"Hush!" whispered Magini, gently withdrawing his hand from under the soldier's head, and letting it rest on Isolina's lap; "I think he will do now; but his wounds must be looked to, and as the *Sieur Fernel* is at the hostelry, I will send a litter for your husband; but should *Fernel* be too busy, which is probable, he will be in equally safe hands in those of *Signor Lambroni*, the *Duc de Montmorenci's* family leech."

"Oh! signor," cried Isolina, clasping her hands, "I would thank you, if I knew how."

"No more of that," said Magini, "my best thanks are in the quiet breathings of that poor soldier, who, I hope, will live to see the folly of

shedding the blood of others, or losing his own in such fierce and unnatural warfare."

So saying, he turned to Ignatius and the Marquis de Millepropos, and bowing gracefully to them as he took off his hat, said—

"Signors, I think we had better proceed with all speed to the inn, for the clouds are gathering fast, and large drops are falling; at all events, I must push on to secure a litter for this poor soldier;—but stop! he may be drenched ere it arrives; surely four of these brave troopers would not mind dismounting, and with a few cloaks and arquebuses, constructing a litter, so that we might take him with us without further delay?"

No sooner said than done, there was a simultaneous movement among the guard; but the four who sprang from their saddles first threw their reins to their comrades, and in an incredibly short space of time constructed a litter, upon which the wounded soldier was gently placed without being awake, while the grateful Isolina walked by his side, although the Marquis de Millepropos (having made the discovery, since her tears had ceased, that she was

exceedingly pretty) had obligingly offered to take her up behind him.

On reaching the town, Catherine de Medici's two hundred Swiss, who escorted the Marquis Millepropas, found some difficulty in advancing, from the manner in which the narrow streets were already crowded with the cavalry, for whom the barracks were not sufficiently large, and whose destined billets were already preoccupied by the martial law of 'first come first served.' Dreux was in those days a fortified town; but on either side of the gate of entrance were two large solidly-built round towers or turrets, and over the archway of the gate was a corridor or gallery, which served as a medium of communication from one tower to the other; which towers, with the gallery, constituted the auberge of the Chante Poulet, where Pierre Pajon filled the double office of landlord and gatekeeper. The rain, which had been threatening so long, now began to fall in good earnest, and while from the windows of one turret of the Chante Poulet were to be seen the heads and hands of several soldiers either drinking or cleaning their arms, the other presented a much more agree-

able prospect to the travellers, that of blazing fires in the two first stories, with briskly turning spits, notwithstanding that they contained whole poultry yards of capons, and parks of pheasants and partridges, with some haunches and hocks of venison,—which seemed to look tenderly towards the former, as if singing, “ We have been friends together,”—while various ‘ marmitons,’ and stout two-handed damsels with cherry cheeks and snow-white coifs, flitted about with large round wire baskets of freshly washed fish and vegetables.

The lord of the soil is always greater in the eyes of his serfs than the greatest monarch who happens to derive his honours from a more distant quarter; consequently, when Pierre Pajon beheld the Marquis de Millepropos, after so long an absence beyond seas, actually honour his door by alighting at it, the King might (had he been there) have spared himself the trouble of being gracious, for honest Pierre would not even have perceived him, as he stood bowing, till his head nearly touched the ground, to the ‘ Seigneur du Village.’ When he at length sufficiently recovered from the over-

powering effects of surprise and respect, the first use he made of his tongue was to exclaim, clasping and wringing his hands, "Ah, Monsieur le Marquis, if you had but arrived half an hour sooner !"

"Pourquoi, mon brave? Why, my good fellow?" asked the Marquis.

"Because," replied mine host, "the 'Chante Poulet' is full—full to the eaves. The very swallows have been obliged to turn out and make way for the soldiers; and by no possible contrivance could I furnish beds for Monsieur le Marquis and his suite."

"Morbleu! then give me a bed and never mind my suite," said the Marquis.

"Impossible!" cried Pierre Pajon, shaking his head mournfully; "for the Duc de Guise and Prince de Condé, who took the field at four o'clock this morning, arrived here an hour ago, half dead with fatigue, and scarcely taking time to finish their supper, retired half an hour since to the only spare bed I had left, where they are now fast asleep."

"Vrai?" asked the Marquis.

"Oh, pour ça, if Monsieur le Marquis will

give himself the trouble of coming up stairs, I will soon convince him that I am incapable of denying my house the honour of accommodating him, were it possible."

And, so saying, Pierre Pajon led the way up the narrow, winding, and loudly-creaking stairs, followed by the Marquis; and, on reaching the gallery, gently opened the door of the third room,—where, sure enough, in a low bed, with a high tester, and dark green serge curtains, bound with yellow galloon, and a portrait of the Virgin (which by no means flattered her) suspended at the bed's head, lay the conquered and the conqueror,—the Duc de Guise and the Prince de Condé!—"dos à dos" (back to back), snoring almost as loudly as the thunder of their own cannon; with no other separation between them than one of the colours of the Duke's army, which played the part of bodkin.

"Poor Prince!" said the Marquis, with a shrug; "no doubt he slept more calmly last night, for then he did not dream of losing the victory; but, perhaps, it was for the good of his health,—for if these Condés go on as they have begun, they will run the risk of being

poisoned by the density of their own laurels." For the Marquis de Millepropos, like all his countrymen, felt proud of the valour of even his enemies, provided those enemies were Frenchmen. "Well," added the Marquis, on his way down stairs; "though beds are scarce with you, provisions seem plenty. So even introduce Bondrée, my cook, to your larder, and let me know the result as soon as possible."

"Oui, mon seigneur; and perhaps Monsieur le Marquis would have no objection to having a couch placed in the 'salle de voyageurs,' where he could sleep, and where the other gentlemen of his party could be accommodated with arm-chairs?"

"A very great objection, Maître Pierre: for I hold that if there is one thing worse than another for the complexion, it is to sleep in a room contaminated with the fumes of wine and animal food,—to say nothing of those sort of impromptu beds, which, from their barbarous infacility for accommodating proper pillows, invariably destroy the set of the hair for a whole week. Mais enfin," concluded the Marquis, throwing himself into an heroic posture, "such

is the fortune of war! 'et je suis Francais, moi! ainsi vive la guerre! quand même——'"

In order to accommodate some of the Duc de Guise's cavalry, Pierre Pajon had caused temporary sheds to be erected, with trunks and branches of trees, and roofed with straw, beyond his stables and cow-houses, intending the more luxurious shelter of those buildings for the soldiers belonging to the aforesaid cavalry. Great therefore was his dismay, when, on descending from the two 'generals' sleeping apartment, he found that the two hundred Swiss, who had accompanied the Marquis de Millepropos, had taken possession of them! while Toucan, not content with the quarters that did for his betters, was installed in the stable, bestowing on himself the freedom of rack and manger. Such was the landlord's displeasure at this state of affairs, that even his respect for the Seigneur de Quillac could not prevent him from venting some of his spleen, by expressing his wonder that Monsieur le Marquis should think it necessary to travel with such a retinue.

"Entre nous, mon brave," said the Mar-

quis, with amiable condescension, placing his hand before his right cheek, as he approached his mouth towards Pierre Pajon's ear; "the Queen Mother, though great as Mark Antony, is nevertheless jealous as Cleopatra; and finding it impossible to shake a resolution I have taken to shut myself up at Quillac for a year, she insisted upon my being surrounded by her own emissaries."

"How!" said mine host, who now thought the Marquis a greater man than ever; "la reine mère se damne pour Monsieur le Marquis?"

"C'est à dire oui. Mais Monsieur le Marquis se sauve—parbleu! tout comme voyez, ha! ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha! ha!"

And then Pierre Pajon laughed; and, after him, Monsieur le Marquis laughed; and then they both laughed together, as they crossed the passage leading to 'la salle des voyageurs,' which before they reached, they were intercepted by a wounded soldier, whose wounds Ternel had just dressed, leaving his wife to chafe a very slight one on his cheek with brandy:

“That is the severest blow I’ve had yet,” said the soldier; “to see those insensible rags soaking up that good brandy. One little drop? only give me one little drop, Marie?”

“Not one drop,” replied the wife; “you know the *Sieur Fernel* said it would be the death of you, and that it was the worst enemy you ever had.”

“Aye, but the *Curé* of *Quillac*, who was here just now, and who evidently thought that I was in advanced guard for the other world, said, that every good Christian ought to be reconciled to his worst enemy before he died. So give me the brandy—there’s a good woman. For what would our general say if, after gaining so glorious a victory over the heretics, he was to hear that any of us had not died like Christians, after all?”

But Marie persisted in her refusal, and only began to cry the more; while the *Marquis de Millepropos*—who slipped into her hand, as he passed, the two *François d’ors* which the young soldier in the *Prince de Condé’s* army had flung down so indignantly an hour before—said to her husband “*Voyez-vous, mon ami*, having

promised your wife that you were dying, 'elle a naturellement peur que les esprits vous revient.' "

On arriving at the common room of the 'Chante Poulet,' the Marquis found the Jesuit, Magini, and the Sieur Fernel, seated round a blazing fire: the latter was entertaining the two former with his ludicrous Latin dialogue in his 'De abditis Rerum Causis,' upon the pretended properties and appearance of a fictitious luminous stone, supposed to have been brought from India.* Among several strangers, scattered about the apartment, was one of a tall, slight, and peculiarly elegant figure; the polished steel and costly appendages of whose armour, together with his golden helmet and its snow-white aigrette, had more the appearance of a knight decked for a tournament than of one who had been engaged in the turmoil of a long and sanguinary battle. He seemed to be labouring under that species of anxiety of

* This dialogue begins, "Omissis seriis liceat mihi tecum parumper urbanius jocari," and is seasoned with the ponderous pleasantries so much in vogue among the learned of that time.

mind which prevents a person from either sitting or standing still, for he kept pacing the room with folded arms, and stopping every moment at the window to look up at the sky, as if his doing so could induce the rain to cease ; but as the vizard was down, it was impossible to distinguish his features, though, if they bore any relation to his figure, they must have been singularly handsome.

The Marquis de Millepropos taking no interest in the conversation going on at the fire, had his curiosity evidently much excited by the stranger, but had no means of gratifying it beyond addressing conjectures to him about the duration of the rain, which, however, were only answered in monosyllables, and left him as wise as he was before. Supper at length made its appearance, to which the Marquis courteously invited the stranger, who accepted the invitation with a bow, and silently seated himself at the table, raising no more of his vizard than was requisite to leave his mouth at liberty, to receive whatever he conveyed to it. Notwithstanding that the wine circulated briskly, and the jest passed from lip to lip, and

found an echo in the joyous laugh of the guests, neither seemed to find favour with the stranger, who continued his supper as silently as he had commenced it; and, bowing to the assembly, rose, when he had discussed it, and left the room.

CHAPTER VI.

“ However bad things may be, consider what would you do if they were worse.”—PHILOSOPHY FOR OTHERS.

“ Il adopta un système de galanterie pénétrante, bien qu’en apparence tempérée, qui pour aller au but par une marche oblique, n’en gagnait pas moins du terrain et surtout n’en perdait jamais.”

LE PARAVANT. “ L’ARBRE DE SCIENCE.”

Œuvre (charmante) de Monsieur Charles de Bernard.

SOMEBODY has beautifully remarked (and yet I have the bad taste not to remember who), that “ flowers are the angels’ alphabet when they write mysterious truths on hills and fields;” and, to judge by the appearance of those about Dreux, the angels had been busy the morning after the battle described in the last chapter; and if they were commentaries on the work of their destroying brother of the day before, they were numerous enough; for the fields on the other side of the town from that on which the

battle had been fought, were perfectly enamelled with those myriads of fragrant little wild flowers, which one night of spring or autumn rain suffices to create, while the sun, whom no human sorrow can cloud, and no human tears can quench, shone out as brilliantly from his azure palace, as if death had no empire, and the grave no victory.

If a cloud was perceptible anywhere, it was (in spite of himself) on the visage of the Marquis de Millepropas, as he approached the long-deserted halls of his baronial castle of Quillac. After the somewhat restless night he had passed at the Chante Poulet,—restless from four causes, any one of which would have sufficed for the purpose; first, he had taken more wine than usual; next, the identity of the stranger was a source of continually recurring conjecture; thirdly, the idea of being immured within the walls of a solitary castle for a whole twelve-month, with no one to boast about, and what was infinitely worse, no one to boast to; while last, and by no means least, his temporary bed was hard, narrow, populous, creaking, and intolerable.

Within half a league of Quillac, however, the Marquis determined to enter his domains 'en seigneur,' as he had quitted them; therefore, having at the top of his voice hummed a popular madrigal, he assumed all his wonted teratology of manner, and turning to Ignatius, remarked--

"I think we did wrong in letting that mysterious personage escape last night; the more I think of it the more I am convinced that he must have been a spy. No man studiously keeps his vizard down for any good purpose. Morbleu! I ask a thousand pardons of messieurs les maris, but I never concealed my face in my life."

"And thus showed them all the *frightful* extent of their danger," said the Jesuit, with a smile.

"Yes, I should not have let that vizard enigma escape," continued the Marquis, pursuing his own thoughts; "however, I am now only a private individual; but the Queen Mother, and, above all, France will soon feel the effects of being deprived of such a plenipotentiary! Mais dit donc, mon père," added he, lower-

ing his voice, and riding up quite close to Ignatius, "do me the -favour, when we arrive at Quillac, not to produce the royal warrant; I will myself take the keys from Bergaro, my seneschal, and deliver them up to you, but as a voluntary act;—you understand, a *voluntary act*."

"Oh, perfectly," replied the Jesuit, with a smile, "and provided the Marquis de Mille-propos conforms to all the royal warrant enjoins, I have no wish to exact the rigour of its public enforcement.

"C'est bien," said the Marquis, waving his hand, and relapsing into silence, for they were now within sight of the broad lands and rich woods of Quillac, and never had their owner felt less proud of either than he did on the present occasion.

"What a beautiful view!" exclaimed Ignatius, as the calvacade drew up at the large massive iron park-gates.

"For you, perhaps," replied the unfortunate Marquis, "but I cannot say that I particularly admire the prospect before me."

"Allons, Monsieur le marquis, de la philo-

sophie!" said the Jesuit, as the ponderous portals opened wide, and then closed upon them.

"Parbleu! me voilà valet de pied à la philosophie, for the next year to come."

"Well, I dare say you will not find her a very exacting mistress."

"On the contrary, it requires to have more patience in her service than in any other."

And again the Lord of Quillac relapsed into silence, which would have been unbroken but for the combined noise of the soldiers' armour, the creaking of their saddles, and the echoes of the horses' feet along the green sward.

Previous to arriving at the castle they had to traverse a wood, in which the approach of so numerous a cavalcade disturbed the pheasants, who rose with a startled ricket, till they got beyond the wood, or roosted in the thickest trees.

"Ah! if one had even a pair of wings in this confounded place," sighed the poor Marquis.

"Cui bono?" said Ignatius, "for if you had, they most assuredly would have been clipped by the royal warrant till this time twelvemonth,

and you would have had to have worn them as an aigrette."

"Apropos of aigrettes—look!" cried the Marquis, as a turn in the wood brought them in view of the castle, "if there is not our silent knight of the Chante Poulet hovering under the windows of the western turret. Ho, ho! Signora Bernardini,—so it appears that there are, as the preachers say, consolations under every misfortune, if one can but find them out."

"Where?" said Ignatius. "I see no one under the turret."

"So, he has vanished!" said the Marquis, rising in his stirrups, "no doubt put to flight by our approach. Surely, mon père, the first thing you will do will be to have a diligent search made after this ubiquitous personage."

"Pardon me, Monsieur le Marquis, the first thing that I must do, according to her Majesty's commands, is to see you comfortably lodged in the western tower; after which, this fresh September morning and a three leagues' ride have given me such an appetite, that I must crave your hospitality to introduce me, without

loss of time, to the contents of your buttery, about which, considering your long absence, I shall not be critical,—in short, a manchet and a venison steak, launched on a stream of Rhenish, and christened with a flask of Malvoisie, will suffice.”

“Humph ! I wish, instead of the lands and signiory of Quillac, I had only been born to a monk’s patrimony,” said the Marquis.

“And what may that be, par excellence ?” asked Ignatius.

“An insatiable appetite, unquenchable thirst, and the right of calling all those who are not old enough to be their brothers and sisters, daughters and sons.”

“Well, brother, ’tis not so bad after all, you’ll allow, pour tout potage ?”

While the word brother, which the Jesuit had spitefully substituted for that of son, was still sticking in the Marquis’s throat, they arrived at the moat : the herald of the guard blew a loud blast from his trumpet, which was immediately answered from the warder of the castle, and the next moment the drawbridge was lowered,—and, while the soldiers were

crossing it, a crimson flag, with the Quillac arms embroidered in purple and gold, was planted on the battlements.

“Remember, I will give you the keys, so not a word about the royal warrant,” said the poor Marquis, trying to put on a careless smile; but the muscles of his face seemed to be labouring under a sudden rust, such difficulty had he in accomplishing it. True to his word, no sooner had he alighted at the castle gates, where all his retainers were drawn up to receive their lord, than returning their salutations with an economical bow, he walked up to Berger, the venerable seneschal, with an air of great dignity, and said, in a loud and commanding voice, “Good Berger, your keys:—’tis well!” added he, taking them, and placing them in the hands of the Jesuit; after which he continued, “Attend well to the instructions I am about to give you: it is my pleasure to remain in perfect and absolute seclusion within this castle,—nay, within the western tower of this castle, for one entire year, dating from this day, without any reference whatever to the new calendar; and as I peremptorily insist upon not having my pri-

vacy for that period disturbed, which could not be the case if the female, who at present occupies the western tower, remained an inmate of the castle, I will myself deliver her into the hands of this holy father, who has my orders to convey her hence to-morrow, by sunrise, under the escort of these brave Swiss, whom their Majesties, ever anxious for my safety, provided me with, as a guard of honour, on my return to Quillac. For the rest, you, Berger, and the knaves under you, will in all things obey this reverend father, while he remains, as if he were your master,—such is my pleasure.”

“So be it, my gracious lord; but I fear me such close confinement may injure your noble health——”

“Confinement is an ugly word, Berger, for confinement implies compulsion; but retirement, which is what I am about to indulge in, is voluntary!”

Ignatius could not help smiling at the turn the Marquis had given to his imprisonment, especially as the latter now took his arm in a patronising manner, as if he intended himself to do the honours in showing the Jesuit the

castle, as he again turned to the seneschal, and said, "See that my brave guard have a sample of the hospitality of Quillac, and that the board in the great hall groan with a suitable breakfast for our worthy friend here,—bearing in mind that there is a wide difference in the appetite of a helmet and a hood." While the Marquis was giving this last direction, and his foot was on the first step of the stairs, a burly butler, who had been whispering a youth, who had a strong family likeness both to a weasel and a skewer, now pushed the latter forward with such an impetus, that he nearly fell flat before the Marquis, had not the rebound of a concussion against the balustrade given him an additional spin, which caused him to regain his equilibrium: "What wouldst thou, varlet? Speak!" said the Marquis.

"So please you, Monsieur le Marquis, we are all so glad you are come back, for we are halfstarved: Fretin, the cook, gives us nothing but radishes and cheese for supper," stammered the youth, transferring his cap from one hand to the other, and maltreating the floor by sundry kicks of his right foot as he spoke.

“Send the knave hither,” thundered the Marquis : when accordingly Fretin was pushed forward (trembling like an aspen leaf) by those victims of his economy, his delighted fellow servants. “How is this, sirrah ! is it true what Guenillon says, that you give the servants radishes and cheese for supper ?”

“Monsieur le Marquis knows,” commenced the cook, darting a look of ineffable contempt at the complainant, “qu’un Guenillon est toujours un Guenillon.”

“Is it true, varlet ?” interrupted the Marquis.

“Ye—ye—yes, but—” stammered the cook.

“Then, mind, sir, for the future,” rejoined the Marquis, making a solemn pause between each word to give them more effect, while the hungry menials awaited breathlessly his generous mandate for redressing their wrongs, “mind, sir, for the future this does not happen, but that one night you give them cheese, and another night radishes.”

The dead silence that followed this speech, was succeeded by a unanimous groan, as soon as they thought the Marquis was out of hearing (and in those dark and unenlightened times

there were no eaves-droppers among these poor vassals to report their disloyalty to their master), while Monsieur Fretin, the cook, stepped briskly up and paid Guenillon a handsome compliment upon the success of his complaint.

“Ha! ha! ha! I do not think that my privacy will be interrupted and disturbed by any more of their grievances,” said the Marquis, on his way to the western tower: “it was a peculiar feature in my diplomacy, and I strongly recommend it to all future rulers whatever, whether monarchs, ministers, ambassadors, governors, or jailers, whenever complaints are made by those under them, to redress the grievance by adding to it; for this line of conduct invariably puts a stop to all future applications, and secures the repose and leisure of those in high places, which, of course, is what is meant by good government and a proper order of things.”

“Hush! listen,” said the Jesuit, when they had reached the door of the western tower, “some one is singing.”

“And yet they say caged nightingales never sing,” said the Marquis, “but this one sings as

sweetly as if she were in a bower of roses. Let us listen, and perhaps this song may give us the clue to the silent knight in the polished armour."

As they listened they caught the following words.

" Oh ! for those by-gone days, when heart
As well as years was young,
And love still played a seraph's part,
And o'er life's fountain hung.

" When smiles ~~were~~ smiles, and tears were few,
And friends were what they seem'd,
And coming years a halo threw,
Of all that life had dreamed.

" When mirth was but joy's lesser part,
Its surface and its glow,
While the deep stream within the heart,
Pursued its equal flow.

" But now life's jaded race is run,
And dreary were its goal,
Had we not God's unsetting sun,
The spirit's day, the soul !"

" Nay, 'tis no love ditty after all," said the Marquis ; " however, it is some time since she has seen me ; and I remark, that whenever women meet with a disappointment of the heart, they instantly begin to think about their

soul, in the hope, no doubt, that that will fare better."

Ignatius tried all the keys till he found the one belonging to this chamber door, which he opened accordingly. Arianna was sitting near the window, but the moment she perceived the Jesuit she ran towards him with an exclamation of joy—while the Marquis stood behind him making pantomimic declarations of love, which nevertheless did not reach the person they were addressed to, who was too intent upon hearing and reciting the events of the last year, to even notice that there was a third person present. Arianna finished her narration by stating, that for the last four months she had been free from the presence and importunities of Vittorio Cappello, but that, on the other hand, the rigour and impertinences of Ferrai had increased to an almost intolerable degree.

"Never mind, daughter, the day of reckoning has arrived,—*your* sufferings are at an end; but for that precious specimen of universal rascality, Master Ferrai, I promise him that he shall soon have heavier chains upon his

hands than the fairy shackles that he used to forge at Venice. Farewell, Marquis," added Ignatius, leading Arianna from the room, "I now leave you in your chamber 'to commune with your own heart, and be still.' "

"But still you leave me, and that is the worst part of it," muttered the disconsolate Marquis, as the Jesuit turned the key in the door, and the echos fell like so many dismal predictions on his ear.

. The next morning—beneath a brilliant, but not very warm sun—might be seen, in front of the Château de Quillac, dashing the diamond dew-drops from the emerald glades of the pleasaunce with the mere echoes of their horses' hoofs, as they rung on the hard gravel, the Queen's guard;—their horses and armour, equally bright, and both men and horses all the better for a twenty-four hours' rest. In the very centre of the two hundred Swiss, they forming a perfect wall on each side of him, rode Ferrai, hand-cuffed and manacled, so that any attempt at escape was rendered impossible. Next to the Jesuit was Arianna, on a beautiful milk-white palfrey, of Arabian lineage, with

housings of azure velvet, flowered with silver, a collar of silver bells, and a silver lily on its forehead, from which protruded a blue aigrette; while in the centre of the feathers was a beautiful blush rose (a rarity at that season), sheltered from the too harsh breath of autumn, by having a paper round it, on which was written—‘*Pour elle qui te ressemble.*’

Though gallantry was by no means an unheard-of qualification among the monks of those times, above all, among the disciples of Loyola, yet the timid and delicate tints of the flower, and above all its soft and concentual fragrance (which seemed the result of a sigh having intervened between it and the common air), appeared to plead eloquently its own and its donor’s cause, and assure Arianna it was not the gift of the Jesuit. Too right-minded to continue to love one so utterly unworthy as Vittorio Cappello, and too pure not to resent his conduct to her individually, she had long banished him from her thoughts; but although the image was broken to which her first devotions had been paid, she would have deemed it profanation to have placed another idol on the

same shrine. The temple had been desecrated—the worship had ceased—and her heart had become a wilderness—where the wanderings of her spirit every day grew more faint and weary; but there is no wilderness which has such mysterious resources as that of the heart: for often when we have resigned all hope, and think that life must terminate in that dark desert of seared feelings, love once more looks from heaven, and feeds us with “angels’ food.”

As Arianna took the rose and praised its beauty, she involuntarily turned round, as if in search of the person to whom her thanks were due. On her left hand rode the knight who had excited the curiosity of the Marquis de Millepropos at the Chante Poulet. He appeared to be on perfect terms with the Jesuit, which confirmed her in the idea that he was an officer—the commander, most likely, of the guard,—and that the rose and its motto were nothing more than a common-place act of gallantry. But as they pursued their route to Honfleur, his attentions were too tender, too engaging, and yet too unobtrusive, to be classed under that head either; for he seemed as one

who, though quite capable of the devotion of a sacrifice, was determined not to incur the humiliation of a defeat. But Florence is a long way from Normandy, and as this unknown knight was to perform the whole of the journey beside Arianna, and consequently did all that he could to protract it, we must be under the necessity of leaving them, in order to arrive there before them ; merely remarking that he took up all his positions so well, that before they embarked at Honfleur, Arianna had first wondered why he had not, and then wished that he had, raised his vizard.

CHAPTER VII.

Angélique—"Crois-tu qu'il m'aime autant qu'il me le dit ?

Toinette—"Hé ! hé ! les choses-là, parfois sont un peu sujettes à caution. Les grimaces d'amour ressemblent fort à la vérité ; et j'ai vu de grands comédiens là-dessus."

LE MALADE IMAGINAIRE.

———"Profite de l'occasion pour apprendre l'histoire de ton ordre : il est de première force sur tous les sujets qui ne servent à rien."—CHARLES DE BERNARD.

SINCE we were last at Florence, three deaths had occurred, that of Cosimo Primo (but being dead let him rest in peace, which, like many others, he never could do while living), and those of the elder Bonaventuri and the Signor Sylvestro. But it is with the results of the latter's demise that we have to do.

Great as is the variety among flowers, there is a still greater diversity among *weeds* ; I mean those worn by widows. Some indulge in a violent and reprehensible intensity of grief, in

donning them, and bury their hearts in the tombs of their husbands ; others imitate, and even surpass, Brutus's philosophic bearing at the loss of his Portia ; while a few rare exceptions, with all the originality of genius, strike out a new plan for evincing resignation economically, and mourning profitably, and to this class belonged the Signora Sylvestro. No sooner had her sposo departed for the other world, where she made sure he enjoyed every happiness (if it were only from the circumstance of having left her behind, for men seldom take their wives when they have anything very delightful in view) ; no sooner then was he no more, than the sight of the most trifling article of wearing apparel belonging to the dear departed became insupportable to her ; it may therefore be concluded that she gave them away ! No such thing ; she set too great a value on them for that, and setting a value *on* them, determined to get the uttermost value *for* them ; so sending for her prime minister, Herr Schnitz, she deputed him to dispose of them among the Israelites, who, though they give nothing for nothing, always give something for whatever

they get. Nay, her irritability of memory even extended itself to her own wardrobe, which would be useless to her during her mourning, and probably might be out of fashion before she doffed it. She, therefore, wisely determined upon expediting her sposo's passage across the Styx by an additional sale ; and so like Joseph's, her party-coloured gear was also sold, but not to the Egyptians.

Yet ever amiably punctilious as to all the decorums of life, even in the midst of these heart-rending arrangements occasioned by death, the signora Sylvestro did not forget, that one benevolent surgeon had sat up with her late spouse, night after night, and had given his time and his skill to the sufferer, for months, without getting anything but cold during the wet winter evenings. Now, knowing that he would not receive anything, and that nothing could repay his services, she determined that nothing should do so ; but he had a wife, and some memento of gratitude might be acceptable to her.

The signora Sylvestro had not been in India without possessing gold ornaments and precious stones in abundance ; but no doubt they had

been the gifts of her *dear* husband, or else reminded her of happier times, ere her hair had began to go, and her wrinkles to come,—so with those she could not part ; but among the different garments she had subjected to the Mosaic law was an ancient Bangalore scarf, between a senna and a prune colour, which from much wear, had here and there derived some of the ruddy hues of her own neck, besides sundry little perforations visible when held up to the light. No wonder, then, that the Israelite rejected this scarf; and Herr Schnits was, after long and fruitless haggling, obliged to bring it back to its original owner, who immediately sat down and dispatched it to the doctor's wife, accompanied by a note which might have served, from its grandiloquent style, as the herald to a present of a casket of jewels ; but, strange to say, the signora of 'il dottore,' ashamed no doubt of having received so costly a remuneration for her sposo's services, never once wore it, though she evinced her gratitude by bestowing her hospitality on the bereaved widow.

It was, therefore, about a week after her

husband's burial that the signora Sylvestro, while discussing the funeral baked meats at the doctor's table, got into such a violent hurricane of indignation at hearing of the indelicacy and want of feeling of two young girls, who had actually been seen in the Prato a fortnight after they had heard of the death of a brother, whom they had not seen for ten years, that had not the doctor, with much skill and promptness, poured her out a large beaker of unadulterated Marsala, she would in all probability have fallen into a fit : what rendered the conduct of these signorini doubly unpardonable was, that they were not only young and pretty, but utterly incapable of appreciating the goodness of Providence ; for they got proposals without taking the slightest trouble to do so, and valued them so little, when they did get them, that they had not hitherto accepted any of them ; a species of ingratitude perfectly incomprehensible to the signora Sylvestro, who was always on the look out for return lovers. And sometimes when she thought that she had succeeded in stopping one, she would get up a sort of one-sided flirtation with some utterly uncon-

scious youth, in the hope of piquing the aforesaid return into more expeditious advances;—heretofore without any fatal results.

But what will not patience and perseverance accomplish? About four months after “poor dear Sylvestro’s” death (for such she had always called him even to his most successful rivals, and still called him to his most probable successors), the fag-end of a regiment—that is to say, a commissary—she had known in India, after having for many years burnt, in the hot east, came to marry in the sweet south, for now his circumstances enabled him to contemplate the bonds of Hymen; that is, he had accumulated a large stomach, a red nose, and innumerable debts. The two former were perfectly visible to the naked eye, but the latter he studiously concealed from the Signora Sylvestro, into whose ears he poured, instead, a thousand professions of unalterable and desperate love! And, sooth to say, his circumstances were sufficiently desperate to render his passion an unhappy one, and warrant his confounding the one with the other.

It was this amiable object (whose baptismal

appellation was Thomas, but who, for the euphonious purposes of love-making, she had anabaptized Lorenzo), that first succeeded in drying her tears, or, to speak more correctly, he was the first whom she had succeeded in making understand that to console the widow was a Christian virtue. From all public amusements the signora Sylvestro had hitherto abstained (beyond a daily walk in the Boboli, when she trusted to accident to bring her in contact with the Grand Duke, and to awaken in him a better taste than that which induced him to prefer Bianca Cappello); but at length arrived a day when all Florence were flocking to the Giardino Buccellai, to see the combat 'à mort' between the Gonfaloniere and Vittorio Cappello. Now the signora (without even knowing what the quarrel was about) strongly advocated Martin Bernardini's cause, merely from the circumstance of Count Cappello being Bianca's brother; she therefore generously resolved to follow the example of the rest of the world, and repair to the Giardino Buccellai, and in case the Gonfaloniere's lance did not do its errand with his foe, assist the onslaught

with the artillery of her eyes. She was sitting, waiting for her Thomas, or Lorenzo, Herr Schnits and his wife, and comparing herself in her own mind to the allegorical figures of Night (who is always represented as a young and beautiful female, clothed in darkness), when a gentle knock came to the sitting-room door.

“Come in,” said the Signora Sylvestro, who, feeling sure it was Thomas,—that is to say, Lorenzo, immediately fell into one of those interesting locomotive paroxysms, between a wriggle and a flutter, for which she was so celebrated; but after wasting the green glories of her eyes, for full three minutes, on the ground, she raised them only to meet those of Madame Schnits, who shone out in all the gyratory splendour of one of the signora’s own ‘*ci-devant*’ fardingales.

“Herr Schnits,” said the lady, “will be here in a few minutes; he is only gone to the Via del Sole, to call for the signor Lorenzo.”

The signora Sylvestro, who had been dying for the last month (that is ever since the day after that Thomas had discovered her abode at Florence), to announce her intended marriage

to Madame Schnits, in order that that lady might no longer have any pretext for not bantering her on the happy event,—was delighted at the opportunity which had thus unexpectedly arisen for doing so: accordingly, determined to avail herself of it, she began in a low simpering whisper, though they were perfectly alone, “ My dear Madame Schnits, I fear you must have perceived the dreadful state poor Lorenzo is in about me? I have preached—I have begged—I have remonstrated with him to wait a few months—only a few months—longer,—but you know there is no getting a man in love to listen to reason! Now what I want is your opinion—your advice; for poor dear Sylvestro was so much older than me, that I feel like a per-r-r-fect baby now that I have to act for myself. What I dread is, Lorenzo’s being hurried away by a sudden and uncontrollable passion; and that it is not that never-changing, undying love, that will continue to our old age; do you think it is?”

Madame Schnit’s private opinion was, that having already reached a very tough and respectable age on both sides, there was nothing

to be apprehended on that score ; but she diplomatically answered, with a shrug of her shoulders, " Alas ! my dear signora, you know men are such deceivers ; and the falsehoods of love are so like truth, that it is scarcely possible to distinguish one from the other ; but consult my husband, he has wonderful penetration in these matters."

Just as the signora was about to reply, somewhat disappointed that her friend had not recommended any salutary cautions to her inexperienced youth, the door opened, and Lorenzo and Herr Schnits made their appearance, the former holding a floral offering for his inamorata ; and the latter, who looked, if possible, more pompous than usual, held his right hand at arm's length, while he kept his eyes steadily fixed upon a small impalpable atom that reposed upon his thumb nail,—and which turned out to be a defunct flea ;

" Here is a curious phenomenon of Nature !" said Herr Schnits, in his peculiarly guttural, solemn, and long-drawn-out German accent ; " which I came into possession of in rather a singular way—but that I will describe to you another

day ; but I was going to observe that, from the tortuous appearance of this flea's left leg, I have every reason to suppose that it died in the act of sneezing : but, as I intend to write an *anagogical* treatise, in two volumes, quarto, for the Entomological school, on this most interesting and useful subject, with a curious episode about the *anhydrous* properties of the flea, I will not now detain you from the Giardino Buccellai, as I know ladies prefer trifling amusements to the higher branches of knowledge and scientific pursuits ! ”

With this compliment to the sex, and a conscious air of masculine superiority, Herr Schnits offered his arm to the signora Sylvestro. Here Lorenzo interfered ; but the signora declared, with an infantine giggle, and what would have been a coquettish shake of the head in a young and pretty woman, that she would walk with Herr Schnits, as she had something of great importance to say to him. Accordingly, no sooner had they turned the corner of the Duomo—Lorenzo and Madame Schnits walking before them—than the Signora Sylvestro, with a considerable reinforcement of wriggling and

simpering,—for she was now not only talking to a man, but in the street where there were many men,—propounded the same question, touching the durability and reality of Lorenzo's love, to Herr Schnits, that she had previously done to his wife ; but instead of answering her immediately, the entomologist came to a dead pause, and looking his companion full in the face for about three minutes, said, raising the forefinger of his right hand prophetically :

“Stop ! these things require great caution, and cannot be decided upon hastily. I will devote myself to watching Lorenzo narrowly and attentively for a year, or a year and a half, and then I will let you know the result.”

“Heavens !” almost screamed the signora Sylvestro, “I cannot wait,—that is, I mean Lorenzo will never be content to wait,—all that time.”

“No !” said Herr Schnits ; “then I should strongly advise you not to think of uniting yourself to such a rash and impatient character.”

There was something in the epithets of rash and impatient, that belonged by right divine

so peculiarly to youth, that they charmed the signora Sylvestro into an involuntary pressure of Herr Schnits' arm ; but, like the ancients (who held round forms sacred, and therefore made both their altars and their tables of that shape), she cast a look of devotion towards the rotund figure of the commissary, as it rolled on before her.

“ Oh ! ” recommenced the signora Sylvestro.—

“ Ah ! ” responded Herr Schnits ; which, it must be acknowledged, was a sufficiently logical reply to the first interjection.

“——You know not what it is at my time of life to be alone in the world,”—and the signora applied her handkerchief to her eyes, no doubt to exclude so frightful a prospect.

“ I quite understand,” said Herr Schnits,—with that leaden solidity of intellect which arrives at the comprehension of that which is before its eyes, without ever even hazarding a surmise relative to the existence of that which is not self-evident,—“ I quite understand that, being somewhat advanced in years, you——”

Here the signora gave a faint, but sharp

cry, and hastily removed her arm from that of Herr Schnits.

“What is the matter? Have you been stung?”

“No,” said the signora, her face suddenly assuming the hue of a well-boiled lobster, “but I believe the street is not a fitting place for the discussion of such delicate subjects.”

“I quite agree with you,” said Herr Schnits. All entomologist though he was, he had not the remotest knowledge of the physiology of the very insignificant insect that now fluttered beside him; neither was he one of those garrulous companions who charge themselves with all the expenditure of conversation; consequently as the signora did not open her lips after her last remark, they arrived at the ‘Giardino Buccellai’ in solemn silence, which was only broken by an exclamation of disappointment on the part of the Sylvestro at seeing all the people coming away, and hearing that the combat had terminated ten minutes before, by Count Cappello’s having been unhorsed, badly wounded, and conveyed by order

of the Grand Duke to the Pitti. Rumour also added, that the Gonfaloniere had wanted to have had a regular tournament ; but since the fatal one which had terminated in the death of Henry the Second of France, all the European crowned heads had combined to abolish those dangerous exhibitions : therefore to this request of Martin Bernardini, Francesco de Medici remained inexorable ; not the less so, perhaps, from the circumstance of the Gonfaloniere's adversary being Bianca's brother.

“ What on earth are the crowd looking at, as the combat is over ? ” said the commissary.

“ It is a statue,” replied Herr Schmits, “ that they are going to erect of the Grand Duke, and it is not yet raised.”

“ It cannot be finished,” said a man in the crowd, “ for though in full armour, it has no gauntlets.”

“ Bah ! the artist knew very well what he was about, and saw that there was no need of gloves, when his hands are always in our pockets,” replied his companion.

“ Ha ! ha ! ha ! by Mercury, thou art right.”

Just as the signora Sylvestro was elbowing her way through the crowd, in no very amiable mood, at this disappointment, fermenting as it did Herr Schnits' 'mal-apropos' truism about her increasing years, a fat lady advanced, with a shining visage of a crimson hue. It appeared, by the "winks, and nods, and wreathed smiles" telegraphed between them, that she was an acquaintance of Lorenzo; and, had any doubt existed on the subject, it would have been ended by his introducing her to the Sylvestro as Signora Grossofiasco—a *particular* friend of his; after which he proposed their adjourning to a neighbouring 'boschetto,' where tables were spread with refreshments of divers kinds. This being agreed to, the commissary disdained the mere mortal beverages of Hippocras, Aleatico, Falernian, and Orvietto, and generously ordered liberal supplies of that sparkling folly called champagne, which has time out of mind had the honour of furnishing jesters for monarchs. During the collation, the circulation of glances and glasses was so commingled, that even the lynx-eye of love could not find any separate charge to bring against Lorenzo and

signora Grossofiasco ; but when the repast was ended, and they walked out together, Lorenzo merely kissing his adieux (via his hand) to the signora Sylvestro, and saying they should return,—she felt that while *they* were going further *she* was faring worse ! It was *too much* ! and she burst into tears.

But time ! time ! what can it not do ?—Aye, it can even dry a widow's tears. And when the shades of evening began to darken the 'boschetto,' and still *no Lorenzo returned* !—and, what was worse, *no Grossofiasco* !—then indeed did she find a sympathising friend in Herr Schnits ; for though Lorenzo had nobly acted up to his former functions in the commissariat, it was very plain that he had no intention of performing those of adjutant : and the bill had to be paid ! and so Herr Schnits informed the Sylvestro. But *she* evidently thought it would be more *German* to the matter if he paid it : which he at length did, with a profound sigh and a mental exclamation of— “ I would not be an ornithologist for the world ! Thank heaven, ants and fleas have *no bills* ! ”

That night the signora Sylvestro perjured

herself, for she swore she should not live till morning; but she did live, first, till another month, when,—“Oh perfidy! thy name is man!”—she heard the bells of San Gaetano ringing for the nuptials of the commissary and the rich signora Grossofiasco;—and after this, she took quite another turn, and never even thought of dying (anything but her old Padusay silks) and lived on, unknown to herself, anticipating Madame de Maintenon's assertion,* (with a difference); and finding great consolation in the idea, that she deserved all the lovers in the world, even though she could not get one!

* “ C'est toujours un grand bonheur de mériter tout, quand même on n'obtient rien.”

CHAPTER

**“Cet abîme de fourberies, et de
la connoissance du laboureur.”—M**

**“Quid vota fi
Quid delubra juva**

**THE cannons were echoir
and the good people were
a festa in the sun, with
about them, if men, and
women, but with a slow
both cases, as if amuseme
requires exertion of body
certain degree it does, es
and, therefore, never ente
hension of an Italian;
shadow of a quiet smile
ing rather than illumina
face, whose owner had su
best view of the Pallone**

races without riders; or better still, who had succeeded in swallowing an unpaid-for glass of lemonade, while the women, whether 'grandamas,' citizens, or 'contadinas,' seemed of the universal opinion, that eyes had been invented but for the one purpose,—of giving and receiving. Why then, as the people thronged the ever verdant gardens of the Boboli, and their shrill voices rose even above the hoarse thunders of the cannon—sat Joan of Austria—looking with aching eyes, and a still more aching heart, upon the crowd below? and for the first time thinking the merry laugh of her little girls discordant, as they played about the room.

Bianca Cappello that morning had had a son, and the event was announced with even more than the usual honours of legitimacy; for the Grand Duke had given orders, previous to the birth of this child, to have everything in readiness (in the event of its being a boy) for an immediate and splendid baptism in the Duomo, followed by a proclamation of its being the heir and successor of Francesco Primo, Grand Duke of Tuscany. There is a grief whose quiet

ravages are more deadly than the uprootings of the most violent sorrow ; just as the mountain torrent, though it devastates and sweeps away all before it for the time, even from the impetuous gushings of its troubled waters, sprays forth the verdure of a future spring ; but the withering and parching sirocco that passes over the desert, has no sigh of mercy in its deadly breath, but blasts for ever. And Joan had experienced too often the matrimonial sirocco of unkindness, injustice, and neglect, which so irrevocably sears a woman's heart, for its traces not to have found their way to her features ; always what those who loved her would have called placid, and what those who did not might have termed cold ; but it was only the slight frost of a somewhat late spring, which the first warm glow of sunshine would have dissolved, and unbound the pure deep current that flowed beneath. But life's sunshine was not for her, and the bud which might have expanded with kindness into so fair a blossom, being so prematurely nipped, presented nothing to a superficial observer, but a pale and sickly blight that cumbered the earth it could not embel-

lish; and yet, wretched as Joan was, she was happy compared to her triumphant, and apparently joyous rival; for the weight of sorrow, however great, is always light compared with that of sin, and the most envious or flattering and smooth-tongued courtiers of either sex, even while they hated, or adulated the roses that bloomed in Bianca's cheeks, would have hardly exchanged with her, to have had the thorns of those roses lacerate and rankle in their hearts as they did in hers.

The Grand Duchess looked from the windows with fixed, but tearless eyes, and she was silent, though not alone, as a fair young face (from which, however, the first girlish glow of youth had passed away), and a pair of deep blue, loving eyes, looked pityingly on hers, while a newly-appointed chamberlain, of gallant and handsome bearing, seemed, as he leaned with one elbow on the back of Joan's high-backed chair, to be incessantly on the watch for the rebound of some of the compassionate glances that these same loving blue eyes bestowed so lavishly on the Duchess.

“Don't stare so, it is very rude to stare at

people, as you are staring at Signora Bernardini, Count Vasi," said Beatrice, the eldest of the Duchess's little girls, unmercifully pulling the beautiful blue velvet cloak of Ernesto Vasi; for this young Venetian noble, the newly appointed chamberlain, and the unknown knight who had accompanied Arianna from the Château de Quillac to Florence, were one and the same person.

And we may as well confess the truth at once; this young man's honourable love did not fare the worse, because he had so secretly hoarded it as long as Arianna passed for the jeweller's daughter, whom, if he thought too humble to marry, he also thought too good to ruin, and too gentle to insult. All this was gratefully, oh how gratefully remembered by the beautiful object of his unceasing adoration, so that every day she felt more happy in his presence, and less happy out of it, though she was not herself quite aware of this fact; nevertheless Arianna had doubts whether she ever would marry; and when ladies have these doubts, lovers, even as constant and devoted as Ernesto Vasi, if any such there be (I myself

believe, though Buffon is silent on the subject, that the race is extinct); but if there be, they must wait patiently, or if that is not possible, impatiently, their liege lady's will and pleasure.

Joan took the little Beatrice on her lap, and chided her with a kiss to heal the reproof for her remark upon the chamberlain; when, child-like, the little girl immediately flew off to another mal-apropos subject, and while she patted her mother's pale cheek, said—

“ But why don't I see my brother, the new Archduke, that all the cannons are firing for? I do so like to have a brother !”

Joan burst into tears as she put the child down, and Arianna led both the children from the room, and then returned to mingle her tears with those of the Duchess; and which were the most bitter it would have been hard to decide. Arianna wept for the fall and the errors of one whom she had much loved, and Joan wept because she had never been loved. Let the chemistry of metaphysics decide which void is the most aching,—that which has never been filled, except by its own yearnings to be so,—or that which

having been filled to overflowing, is drained for ever?

But the tears of women must be infinitely lighter than the air they breathe, since they weigh so little in the scale of creation, as never to turn the beam even a hair's breadth on their side, however abundant they may be. So we will leave the Duchess and Arianna to their woman's fate, of sorrowing unheeded and alone, while we follow into their privacy two actors in our busy scenes, who were not much more rejoiced at the birth of the Archduke than those we have just quitted.

In the great gallery of the Palazzo Vecchio, whose now faded frescos were then vivid and fresh from the master-hand of Vasari, walked the Cardinal de Medici and the Gonfaloniere; the former with his hands behind his back, his eyes bent on the ground, and his nether lip sharply bitten, while Martin Bernardini, who was in his state armour of bright silver, damascined with a rich chasing of gold, walked beside him, with folded arms, it is true, but with his head thrown back, and a calm yet somewhat

ironical smile flitting round his mouth, like a man sure of his points, whatever cards turned up. A pause had ensued in their conversation, which the Gonfaloniere was the first to break.

“What is to be feared, your eminence, is, that the Grand Duke’s infatuation, after the detestable event of this morning, may lead him to sue for a divorce, and having managed to get Philip of Spain, Catherine de Medici, and Lainez, the general of the Jesuits, on his side, with that subtle devil, Ignatius Dragoni (whose tone to and about the Bianca is most miraculously changed since his return from France), the Pope may be induced to grant it.”

“Gonfaloniere,” said the Cardinal, suddenly stopping and looking his companion sternly in the face, “it is the Pope’s privilege to pardon sin, but not to propagate it. He would never grant such a divorce. Did his predecessor, Paul, grant a divorce to Henry the Eighth of England?”

“No ; but what was the consequence ?”

“His excommunication !” thundered the Cardinal.

“ His secession from the Church of Rome,” replied the Gonfaloniere calmly, lowering his voice.

The Cardinal knit his brows, but remained silent.

“ The fact is,” resumed Martin Bernardini, “ his Holiness, what with piety and politics, is situated much between the same sort of perpetual dilemmas as poor Father Clement, the Catholic bishop of the African island of Lampedusa, and is therefore often obliged to steer clear of his surrounding embarrassments by a similar impartiality of conduct. Lampedusa being a small island in the Mediterranean, between Tunis and Malta, where there is one chapel dedicated to the Madonna and another to Mahomet,—Father Clement, whenever a Christian vessel hove in sight, instantly lit a lamp before the Virgin ; but no sooner was the pennant of a Turkish ship visible, than he lost no time in illuminating the Mohammedan temple, and thus pleased all parties and secured his own prerogatives.”

The Cardinal, little relishing this side-thrust at the Church, would not give it the importance

of a defence, but merely said, in reply to the original question of divorce,

“ Were my brother mad enough to attempt such a thing, and the Holy See were not in existence, there is still the same Pregadi, who erased the name of Bianca Cappello from the roll of San Marco, to carry out its just resentment.”

“ True, there is still the same Pregadi,” rejoined the Gonfaloniere, “ but I would wager the city standard to a cobweb, that that same Pregadi,—aye, by San Stefano! and the senate and nobles to boot, who, with such proper indignation, disinherited the wife of Pietro Bonaventuri from being a daughter of San Marco,—would, with most loyal alacrity be ready to do homage to the Grand Duchess of Tuscany, and reinstate her in all the paternal honours of their saint.”

“ You think, then,” said the Cardinal somewhat acrimoniously; “ that whatever feather the wind blows uppermost, that should men stick in their caps and clamour for?”

“ I do not think they should,—but I know they do,” replied the Gonfaloniere; “ but your

eminence's shaft aims not at me ; for I refused all the Grand Duke's overtures ; resisted all my newly-found niece's tears and entreaties, even to see the favourite, who was her early friend and benefactor ; and, despite both, placed her about the person of the Duchess."

"But the Arch-Duke Antonio was not then born," said the Cardinal, with a sneer that might have roused a less consummate actor than Martin Bernardini into some slight show of resentment ; but he merely continued, with an additional reinforcement of affected 'bon-hommie.'

"True ; but setting aside all temper, which invariably tilts one out of one's vantage ground ; and all personal interest, which as invariably warps the judgment, and clouds the intellect ; we cannot disguise from ourselves, however disagreeable it may be, the fact of Vittorio Cappello's hourly increasing sway over the Grand Duke ;—the most startling and miraculous proof of which is, that his insolence has actually made Bonaventuri popular ! and it is but natural to suppose, that the same pride

which caused Cappello to visit his sister's 'més-alliance' with such vengeance, will prompt him to aim at almost impossibilities for her aggrandizement; besides which, he owes my niece and me a considerable grudge for rejecting his alliance, after all the insults he had previously offered her: this, I fancy, rankles in him far more than the wound (though a pretty deep one) that I inflicted on him in the Buccellai, six months ago; consequently, he naturally includes your eminence's interests, which I may call our party, in his hatred and opposition. But the chief danger is from the favourite herself: for it is not our actions, however bad, that injure us in this world, so much as our conduct after them;—and Bianca, in one respect, resembles her friend Titian,—for her designs, even when most faulty, are so exquisite in their tone, and so happy in their colouring, that they take admiration by storm, and disarm criticism."

"So it appears," said the Cardinal, tartly;
"when the Gonfaloniere so lauds her."

"I laud her not," replied Martin Bernardini;

"on the contrary, every day I am more and more inclined to agree with Aristotle, that woman is a beautiful error of creation."

"'Sdeath!" cried the Cardinal, taking off his hat and chafing his temples; "and Aristotle might have added that elder brothers were a frightful mistake."

"True," rejoined the Gonfalonfere, as his keen bright eye seemed to pierce into the uttermost depths of the Cardinal's soul; "true, did not *death* sometimes make a few necessary errata."

"Nay," said the Cardinal, as if afraid of compromising himself even to himself; "I spoke not as a kinsman; 'twas of the welfare of the state I thought. But for Francesco! heaven and our race be praised, his feelings are too short, for his life not to be long."

Here a pause of some seconds ensued.

"You understand," resumed the Cardinal, "'twas of the welfare of the state I spoke?"

"Aye, mine ears were sponsors to your eminence's patriotism: whose firm resolve, and high intent, I do believe, would deem no sacrifice too great to insure the country's wel-

fare. And," added Martin Bernardini, after a short pause, during which he bent his eye on the Cardinal, with the fascination of a rattlesnake; "there are ways which that welfare might be achieved, if——"

But here the doors opened, and a page announced the cardinal's coach, and the Gonfaloniere's horses, to be in readiness, to convey them to the Duomo, for the ceremony of the Archduke's baptism.

"If it is for the good of the state," said the Cardinal, solemnly, as soon as they were again alone; "that I should, by assisting at, legitimise this ceremony, God knows! I cannot make a greater sacrifice."

"But *this* sacrifice," replied his wily companion, "from your Eminence's rank in the Church, and position as heir presumptive to the Grand Duchy, is *compulsory*; and it is only *free-will* offerings that are salutary."

The Cardinal, who mistook the drift of this speech, or rather who was not bad enough to apprehend it, replied, with ironical warmth—"Such, for instance, as *the Gonfaloniere's*

homage will no doubt be, ere this hour expire, to the heir apparent !”

“ Oh, in that matter,” said Martin Bernardini, with more than his usual coolness, as he took his golden and richly-jewelled helmet from off a neighbouring table, placed it with both hands leisurely on his head, and then shook its snow-white plumes,—“ in *that* matter I am but a tyro ; so *my* oaths of allegiance will only be the *temporal shadows* of your Eminence’s *spiritual aspirations* for the young Prince’s *long life and prosperous reign !”*

• It was no part of the Cardinal’s policy to quarrel with the Gonfaloniere,—and, however we may conceal it from others, we have always *within* a just plummet whereby to measure our own depth,—and Ferdinando de Medici *felt* that he was no match for Martin Bernardini ; so linking his arm within that of the latter, he said, with a smile, “ Come, let not the birth of this brat be the signal of *our dissolution*,—there is no use in separating body and soul. So e’en let your allegiance and my benedictions travel together to the Duomo, and consecrate the Archduke.”

“ Our fates are settled for us the day we are born !” said the Gonfaloniere, as they descended the stairs. “ But,” added he, in a whisper, “ that which *begins* with our birth seldom accompanies us to the end of our days.”

It was impossible to tell which was the most dense,—the crowd that filled, or the flowers that strewed, the streets of Florence, as processions of different religious orders, from the white Franciscans down to the barefooted, brown-clad, partially shorn brothers of St. Joseph, proceeded to the Duomo, flinging incense, and chanting the ‘ *Omnes gentes plaudite.*’ The church was filled with spectators, and hung with cloth of gold. The steps of the altar were covered with violet velvet, embroidered in golden lilies ; while the chains of the golden incense burners were alternate links of diamonds and sapphires ; so that as the sacristans and choristers flung them to and fro, they appeared to be scattering sunbeams about the altar ; on either side of which was ranged the whole court, and the Grand Duke, in his robes of state. The mass was then sung ; after which the bishop, bearing in his arms the infant

Archduke, passed on, followed by the whole court, into San Giovanni, or the Baptistery, and the cortège moved up the aisle through the giant guard of granite columns, till they came before the altar, from which the figure of St. John, amid all the angels that were bearing him to heaven, appeared to look down upon the font placed beneath. This font was of lapis-lazuli, ornamented with bassi-relievi, by Giovanni dell' Opera. The bishop held the child ; but it devolved upon the Cardinal de Medici to pronounce the baptismal rites ; and although he sprinkled the holy water, it must be owned, not too gently on the infant's face, it uttered no sound,—a circumstance which was highly satisfactory both to the Cardinal and the Bishop ; but many female antiquities present shrugged their shoulders and pronounced it a bad omen,—for the wise in such matters have a theory (and it is by no means without a semblance of probability), that as there is so much cause for tears in this world, children who shed none at their christening do not live long. No sooner was the ceremony over, than all the nobles knelt to take their oaths of

allegiance to the newly inaugurated heir-apparent. After which, they retraced their steps down the aisle, and with a burst of military music, those then brightly gilt and exquisitely wrought bronze doors of Ghiberti's, which Michael Angelo pronounced worthy of being the gates of paradise, flew open, and the procession (even those members of it who, like the Cardinal and Gonfaloniere, had not come on foot), walked back to the Pitti under the awning of gorgeous state canopies.

"It would be a matter of curious speculation," said the Cardinal de Medici to Martin Bernardini, as they walked side by side in the procession, while the chanting of the monks in some manner rendered their conversation confidential, "to guess at what the difference of destiny would be to Tuscany, and to the individual himself, had this child been the son of Joan of Austria, instead of 'la detestabile' Bianca!"

To which query the Gonfaloniere, who always assumed a plethora of pious decorum in public, merely replied, turning up his eyes,

“It would indeed ! but the ways of heaven are——”

“Inscrutable—are they not, most noble Gonfaloniere ? ” said, or rather shrieked, an old woman, of hideous and excited aspect, as she forced her way through the crowd, thrusting her skinny clenched hand almost in Martin Bernardini’s face ; and disappearing as suddenly as she had appeared, with a frightfully wild and hollow laugh.

“Let the hag be seized ! ” cried the Gonfaloniere, turning deadly pale, and involuntarily half drawing his sword ; “ ’tis Giovannina Neri, the witch.”

But all research was vain : the old woman could nowhere be found.

“Not a very bewitching object either,” said Vittorio Cappello, sneeringly, as he looked back over his shoulder at Martin Bernardini, with all the newly-acquired insolence of manner which the ceremony of the morning had so tended to increase ; “yet I wonder too, signor Gonfaloniere, that a man of your quality should dabble in sorcery, and have recourse to witches !”

“At all events,” replied the Gonfaloniere, who was never more than for half a second, by any circumstance, however appalling or unexpected, betrayed into an outward display of his inward feelings,—“no one can be surprised that Count Cappello, after the ceremony we have just had the *honour* of assisting at, should prefer the *natural* course of events !”

CHAPTER IX.

“De l'homme du monde le plus impérieux, une femme peut faire tout ce qu'il lui plaira, pourvu qu'elle ait beaucoup d'esprit, assez de beauté, et *peu d'amour*.”—FONTENELLE.

THE people groaned under innumerable abuses, and the state tottered under the overwhelming weight of accumulating debt ; but the court of Francesco de Medici was as brilliant and light as if the former had not had a single oppression to complain of, and the latter had not owed a doit. Masque succeeded masque, and ‘festa’ followed ‘festa.’ Bianca, more powerful than ever since the proclamation of the Archduke Antonio,—but, nevertheless, more than ever unable to bear the reproaches of her own conscience,—endeavoured, if she could not silence them, at all events to drown them in a continual whirlpool of dissipation :—for it is one of the unrepealable laws of nature, that, in

order to be happy, we must be on good terms with those with whom we live: and if we have that within which makes life insupportable to us, we will as naturally try to fly from ourselves as from other tormentors. But there is this unfortunate difference between the two sources of affliction,—from others we may escape, but from ourselves we cannot! Is anything, therefore, in this world, worth our entailing on our existence the heavy mortgage of a bad conscience? I think not: but this is evidently the opinion of the minority.

Since Vittorio Cappello's extraordinary favour with the Grand Duke, several Venetian nobles had flocked to the gay court of Florence; and even those who were not Venetians, attracted by the renown of its pleasures and festivities, had come from the ponderous splendours of Venice, to flutter in the sparkling atmosphere of the Tuscan court. Among these, were Don Gomez de Sylva, the Spanish ambassador; and among the former, Filippo Borgia. Torquato Tasso, too, who, disgusted with his persecutions, had made his escape from the Franciscans at Ferrara, leaving them every

thing, even to his manuscripts, was now passing through Florence, on his way to his sister Cornelia, at Sorrento ; but although Scipio de Gonzaga, the friend of his early youth, had recommended him to the good offices of the Cardinal de Medici, and the latter had prevailed upon his brother, the Grand Duke, to offer him a high and lucrative appointment in his household, yet the poet, destitute as he was of all this world's good things, refused to enter the service of Francesco de Medici, from an over-refined feeling of gratitude to his early patrons, the D'Este family.

It was this influx of Venetians, and "old acquaintance," at Florence, that awakened in Bianca Cappello the puerile vanity of wishing to dazzle them with her splendour ; or, perhaps (for within the heart there is ever an under-current of real motives, which does not always rise even to the surface of our own perception), she thought to eclipse, with her splendour and pomp, the deformity of her vice : for by this time she knew the world so thoroughly, that she was fully aware, that even the errors which seek for charity in rags can find neither pity

nor toleration ; while the crimes that are dressed in ermine and velvet, may hold a court, and will not lack courtiers. Having set her heart upon giving a magnificent ‘ festa di ballo,’ in the villa Strozzi, she was determined to carry her point, though Francesco de Medici had for a long time resisted her importunities, pleading the expenses of the Archduke’s christening, and the enormous cost of the still unpaid-for grounds at Pratolino. But what was a discontented people, or a drained treasury, compared to the dearly-bought caresses of a mistress, who, having no love, could not be expected to have any pity for the victim she was ever impelling forward to destruction ? Strange ! that men, whom it is almost impossible to influence to do right, are so easily led to do wrong : it must be that their vanity cannot resist the assumed affection and adulation required to achieve the latter point ; for it is very certain that gentlemen in the position of Francesco de Medici, are precisely on a par with the clay gods of the Chinese,—who are only idols as long as they grant every request made to them ; but are either abandoned or torn to pieces, as

useless incumbrances, the moment they turn a deaf ear to the petitions they receive.

Poor Grand Duke ! his will was sovereign elsewhere in Tuscany, but at the villa Strozzi he was only a slave. Consequently, coloured lamps in that beautiful villa peopled every tree, on a soft July night, till the grounds had the appearance of Aladdin's garden of gems,—music concealed in the different boschettos and shrubberies, stole ever and anon mystically upon the hushed and balmy air : while the refulgent moon, in cold calm dignity, looked gently down on the mimic brilliancy below. Francesco finding that all resistance had been vain, as he was to do it, determined to “do his spiriting gently,” and therefore entered ‘con amore’ into the spirit of this festa ; the more so, that, secretly owing a grudge to certain of his courtiers who had openly espoused the Grand Duchess's cause and the Cardinal's party, he resolved upon that night to pay them off in a way that should increase the mirth of the festa at their expense. A small pond, which still exists in the gardens of the villa Strozzi, near the fountain of Hercules, was

then, as now, filled with stagnant water. This pond the Duke resolved to have drained and filled with wine, which should be communicated to the reservoir of the Hercules; so that all the world would naturally flock to see the son of Jupiter and Alcmena.

Entering on his new labour, of quaffing a pond full of wine at a given signal,—the pond itself he resolved to have boarded over with very slight planks, that being afterwards gravelled, appeared uniform with the rest of the ground, but which, upon any extraordinary pressure, would be sure to give way, and plunge those on their surface into the depths below. Now, the only difficulty was, to find an artizan of sufficient ingenuity to carry this plan into execution, and of sufficient discretion to keep the secret when executed. The Duke was aware that parties ran so high, or rather that he was so unpopular, that no Florentine could be trusted, as they would indubitably put the Cardinal's faction on their guard. Here, then, was a dilemma that seemed insurmountable. What was to be done? But Bianca's invention was seldom at fault; and she, knowing his

mechanical genius, and that his services and silence could always be insured at an adequate price, suggested the temporary release of Giovanni Ferrai, who had been thrown into solitary confinement, there to end his days, ever since Arianna's arrival at Florence.—Charmed with the idea, Francesco instantly availed himself of it; and awaited, as impatiently as a child does the advent of a new toy, the night of the festa. It came at length, as all things do, whether evil or good.

Seated on a temporary throne at the entrance of the grounds, entirely composed of the rarest flowers, Bianca received her guests as Flora: her beauty, considerably heightened by being divested of the cumbrous dress of the time, and her magnificent hair being classically arranged. Francesco felt that he was somewhat too material to undertake the part of Zephyrus, and therefore contented himself with having enacted the Tattius to this beautiful Flora, who, nevertheless, did not lack Zephyrs, Loves, and Graces, in abundance; especially as her cornucopia was filled with trinkets and gems, which she distributed to the different

guests as they entered. On all the refreshment tables, which were profusely scattered about the grounds, were gold enamelled cups, or vases filled with perfumes, embroidered gloves and fans.

“Well, certainly there is no disputing La Bianca’s taste,” said the Gonfaloniere, looking around and addressing the new-made Cardinal, Ignatius Dragoni, Don Gomez de Sylva, and the Cardinal de Medici. “What thinks your Eminence of the Grand Duke’s munificence, too? They say he has filled the reservoirs with wine, and that at a given signal Hercules is to get as drunk as Bacchus!”

“Bah!” replied Ferdinando de Medici, pettishly—“*Les amoureux font dans la société ce que les fanatiques font en religion.*” *

“Eh, how so?” said Don Gomez de Sylva; “you, signor Gonfaloniere, who are ‘*tam Mercurio quam Marti,*’ expound this to us, pray.”

“Why, I suppose,” laughed Martin Bernardini, “his Eminence means, that lovers, like fanatics, while they pester their divinity

* So at least said the gallant, but ungallant, Prince Eugene.

with prayers from morning till night, either sacrifice or neglect the rest of the world without mercy."

"There about," replied the Cardinal.

"It is terrible," said Ignatius Dragoni, who remembered that he was talking to the Cardinal de Medici and the Gonfaloniere, "to think that while the exemplary and virtuous Joan of Austria is pining in neglected loneliness, such a woman as Bianca Cappello is the adulated queen of this scene of enchantment."

"Nay," said Don Gomez de Silva, touching with the hilt of his rapier as he spoke the Jesuit's newly-acquired scarlet hat, "with all due deference to your Eminence's pious indignation, you must at least allow the last-named lady *one cardinal virtue*, though perhaps neither prudence nor justice."

Dragoni thought it wise in the presence of Don Gomez, who knew him far better than his other two companions, to adopt the former of these virtues, and therefore remained silent.

While this conversation was going on at one part of the gardens, the Grand Duke was busying himself in the preparations for his plot

near the statue of the colossal Hercules ; but that incomparable individual, though somewhat ' gauche,' courtier, signor Millantatore, who had not tact enough to perceive that the Prince at that moment was in such a state of pre-occupation that he had the bad taste not to crave his company, still persisted in overwhelming him with compliments, as colossal as the statue near which they were standing, relative to the unparalleled taste he had displayed in the arrangements of the festa; till the Duke, at length fairly exasperated beyond all patience, told him to " begone, for a prating fool."

This unguarded truth had such an effect upon the weak nerves of poor Millantatore, that he repaired to the mistress of the revels to lodge his complaint, pointing, at the conclusion of it (as the tears fell from his eyes), to his new-blown honours of the cross and scarf of San Steffano ; " really, bella Bianca," added he, " if it were only this cross which your goodness obtained for me, it might have shielded me from such an insult from the Duke."

" Alas ! signor Millantatore," she replied, with an acuminous smile, which doubly barbed

the shaft that raised the laugh against poor Millantatore ; “ although I have it in my power sometimes to procure crosses, you see the Duke still reserves to himself the privilege of conferring titles.”*

“ Ah ! you see,” said Gonzo Damorino, “ the signora says, it is not in her power to bestow titles ; so, perhaps, you will never get the order of San Steffano after all.”

“ But I have got it,” roared Millantatore in his step-son’s ear, as they walked away together ; the latter not over pleased at the commencement of his evening’s amusement.”

“ And as you have not got it,” pursued and persisted Gonzo, “ the best plan is to think no more about it ; for I have discovered the only way to be happy in this world is never to wish for anything :—and if you get it, well and good ; for it is then too late to wish for it.”

Millantatore, who lived post (for steam was not then invented), felt that both time and life

* This was a ‘bon mot,’ on a similar occasion, of the present Grand Duke of Lucca, who has as much wit as most men, to say nothing of princes, and who, if not ‘le prince des philosophes,’ is certainly ‘le plus philosophe des princes.’

were too short to profit by his step-son's tortoise-progressions in philosophy ; and being moreover what was in those days emphatically termed a cloak-grasper,* he now perceived the Conte Ricci, who having also on his side perceived him, was hastily, like a startled deer, making his escape through an adjacent thicket of flowering myrtles ; so that in vain he cried, at the top of his voice,

“ Ricci—Ricci—one moment—a word with you——”

For the louder Millantatore called, the faster the Count ran ; till, quite exhausted from his vocal exertions, the former sunk down upon a bench, splenetically exclaiming,

“ I declare Ricci is deaf as well as blind ; and though the latter may be very convenient for his wife, the former is very inconvenient for his friends ! ”

Millantatore had only occupied his seat a few minutes, when he heard Bonaventuri's voice, accompanied by a mandolin (but both in a subdued tone), singing the following song :—

* The cloak-grasper of the sixteenth century was the paternal ancestor of the button-holder of the nineteenth.

“ Near the dark myrtle shade, with a low serenade,
As woos the young flowers the bee,
Where the bright waters glide, with their murm’ring tide,
I’ll wait, my Clorinda, for thee.

“ There’s no music so sweet as thy light-falling feet,
When their echoes steal over my heart!
’Tis thus meeting, my girl, in fate’s cup is the pearl,
Which sorrow dissolves when we part.

“ Alas! Time’s on the wing, so come, let us fling
Love’s rainbow o’er life as he flies;
For if aught can delay, or tempt him to stay,
’Twill be the deep spell of thine eyes.”

“ Ho! ho! Signor Bonaventuri, does the wind still sit in that quarter? Doubtless then there was something in Ricci’s heels that told his ears he would be one too many if he lingered any longer in that said dark myrtle shade,” said Millantatore; “ but,” added he, “ as I live, there goes the rocket that was to be the first signal for the banquet of Hercules,” and so saying he arose and hastened with the rest of the crowd, who were hurrying from all directions to the one focus of attraction.

This rocket was merely to give notice to all the assembled guests scattered in different parts of the grounds; but the final signal was to be given by the Duke himself, and was to

be announced by the rising of a magnificent peacock, done in fireworks.

Previous to giving this signal, Francesco de Medici, with great apparent suavity, was exerting himself to secure the best places for his victims, and calling out their names aloud, "Signor Nero, this way! Bettino Ricasoli, more to the left! Cavaliero Monaco, from this point will be the best view; Caliaro and Signori Sanessi, forward; mio caro Ginori, here! Germanico Sauriano, Scotto Ferrante dal Monte, Luigi Porto, Federigo, Raffaello, Gualterotti, further to the left, I pray you! But where are our good friends Count Ricci and the Intendant? Ho! Signor Bonaventuri! Signor Ricci?" but echo did not even answer "where?" Again, and yet again, the Duke called out the names of the absentees, but a dead silence was the only answer.

During this pause, the Cardinal de Medici whispered the Gonfalonieri—

"Here is another stroke of the subtle policy of 'la detestabile Bianca!' Did you mark the Duke's civility to all our party? He did not mention a single friend of his own, in his

anxiety to procure his guests a good view of this folly,—except the Intendant.”

The names of Ricci and Bonaventuri again rang through all the intricacies of space, but neither of their owners appeared.

“ *Che vada!* let it go!” muttered the Duke, impetuously, and then gave the signal, when the illuminated bird rose proudly in the air, irradiating the giant head of the Hercules, while the bright scintillas of its myriad sparks again descended and mingled with the ruby flood, which he tossed upwards, as if pledging the moon ere he drank it.

Enchanted with so novel a display, the courtiers clapped their hands, and kept such vehement time with the shuffling of their feet to their reiterated ‘*bravissimos,*’ that, lo! the treacherous planks gave way, and with one tremendous splash and universal yell, they were plunged, with all their costly gala dresses, into the unfragrant pool of muddy wine, below.

Martin Bernardini, who involuntarily paid his court, by laughing almost as loudly as the Duke himself, could not resist turning to the Cardinal de Medici, and saying—

“ It would appear, that this stroke of the Bianca’s (if indeed the merit of the device be not entirely your royal brother’s) is even more subtile than your Eminence gave her credit for; for gaining partizans is one thing, but stocking ponds is another !”

“ Especially with such gudgeons,” interposed the Duke, who overheard the remark.

But as spoiling their clothes, and giving them an impromptu bath, was the extent of Francesco de Medici’s premeditated vengeance, he now gave orders to have them rescued from the jeopardy they were in, which their own efforts only tended to increase; for the more they tried to extricate themselves, the deeper they got in the mud, as both wine and water were now evidently ebbing.

During their rescue, the Duke and the rest of the court walked away to another part of the grounds, considerately leaving them to make an unwitnessed retreat as they best could.

When the last victim was safely dragged to *terra firma*, Cardinal Dragoni, who had stood leaning against a tree, from whence he had seen the whole process, was about to walk

away, when he was stopped by Ugolino Harredia, the blind boy, laying his hand upon his tippet, and saying—

“ Sweet sir, whoever you are—stop—listen ! I hear groans beneath the earth ! ”

“ My son, I hear nothing,” said Dragoni, inclining his ear downwards.

“ Ha ! there it is again,” rejoined the blind boy, still listening, but raising his hand as he spoke, and touching Ignatius’s hat. “ You should be a cardinal, by your hat ; if so, then I entreat your Eminence to follow me to the subterranean caves of the grotto, which are close by ; for as sure as we are here, some one has either lost his way, or come to harm down below ! ”

“ But, my son, I know not the way to these caverns, and, therefore, we may incur danger without rescuing others.”

“ Not so, I know every wind of them,” said Ugolino ; “ there are plenty of torches at the entrance of the grotto ; your Eminence has only to take one of them and follow me, and I will lead you safely.”

“ You are sure, my son, that you are not

about to practise on me another of the Grand Duke's pleasantries?"

"Rather than your Eminence should think so, I will go alone," said the boy; "I am not afraid,—for darkness and I are friends that never deceive each other;—but if there should be danger to any one else, I wanted eyes to see it, for those I have not got."

"Then, by St. Francis! you shall have mine," said Ignatius; "for you seem a fine little fellow,—so come along."

Ugolino did not wait for a second invitation, but walked, or rather ran, forward, dragging the Cardinal after him, till they entered the grotto, which was close at hand,—when, seizing a torch, and giving it to the Cardinal, he proceeded more cautiously, till they found themselves in the very heart of the cavern, underneath the water works, when their progress was impeded by a pool of mud and slime, mixed with the strong fumes of wine,—in the midst of which lay a man, quite dead, apparently from suffocation, grasping an iron bar in one hand, and an extinguished torch in the other; as his head protruded forward into the

outward cavern, where Dragoni was standing, as if (as most probably was the case), in attempting to escape, he had been thrown backward, from the influx of the stream. The Cardinal, on raising the torch, beheld, at the other end of the cavern, that the door of the sluice had been left open: and it might be that, in too tardily trying to remedy this neglect, the individual before him had met his death.

“Go, my son,” said Ignatius, “and bring hither two serving-men,—for though I fear life is totally extinct, it behoves us to ascertain the fact beyond a doubt.”

Ugolino was scarcely gone, before Dragoni heard a low clear voice, which, having once heard, was never forgotten, saying, beside him, “I congratulate Cardinal Dragoni upon having his *hat*, otherwise he might chance to take cold in these caverns.”

Ignatius raised his eyes, and beheld Magini! who, not giving him time to reply, added, as, with a branch of cypress that he held in his hand, he removed the mire from the dead man’s face, and disclosed the features of the Venice

goldsmith, frightfully convulsed, from his ineffectual struggles with the death which had overtaken him at the very moment when he thought he had secured both fortune and liberty.—

“ You see that the devil has had his due,— so there is no use in our remaining here ; especially as a murder has been done in the boschetto of myrtles within the last five minutes, which may involve more important consequences.”

Dragoni stared at his extraordinary companion without finding the power of utterance.

“ You may remember,” resumed Magini, “ a conversation we had upon the subject of divorce in the gardens of the ‘ Mille feuilles,’ at Paris, about a year ago ? One divorce has been just accomplished ; and the other will be granted in due course, without the intervention of the pope.”

At the entrance of the grotto they met Ugolino, with two servants bearing torches.

“ Giovanni Ferrai is quite dead,” said Magini to the latter ; “ but you had better bear him back to his dungeon in the Pallazzo

Vecchio:—as being the Gonfaloniere's prisoner, his body is his property."

"Had we not better repair to the boschetto, where you say this murder has been done?" said Ignatius, as soon as his nerves had been sufficiently braced by the fresh night air, to recover their tone from the bewilderment the sudden apparition of Magini had thrown them into.

"There is no occasion," replied the latter; "'tis the work of one head and several hands,—and were we to be found on the spot, our's might be confounded amongst them. But come,—the banquet has begun! our places are still vacant, and we shall miss the first attack upon the Trojan boar."*

In a temporary pavilion, erected near the chapel, in the gardens of the villa Strozzi, sat Francesco de Medici and Bianca Cappello, at

* It was the custom among the ancient Romans, a custom followed by all the Italian people of the Middle Ages, to have at their great banquets, a boar filled with innumerable lesser animals, such as hares and rabbits, also poultry and game of every description, in imitation of the well-populated wooden horse of Troy. The magnate of the feast had always the honour of cutting up this Trojan boar, with the still more enviable privilege of cutting every other *boar* besides,

supper, surrounded by their courtiers and their guests. Bright flowers bloomed, and brighter eyes sparked. The spicy ruby and the fragrant amber wines brimmed the golden cups, till they looked as if the jewels around them had dissolved into one bright universal flood ; and the music that every now and then stole upon the ear of the revellers, was scarcely more harmonious than the silvery laugh of one half the crowd, occasioned by the jests or the flattery of the other half. The Contessa Ricci laughed too ; but it was the cold, hollow laugh, that merely echoes the mirth of others, when the heart is away, and cannot fill it. She looked towards the entrance of the pavilion incessantly ; and then she turned and tried to appear interested in the conversation of Tasso, who sat beside her, and who was commenting on Camillo Pellegrino's work on Epic Poetry, to which his "Jerusalem" had given rise. The poet at length perceived that she neither heard nor understood one word he was saying ; and was good-humouredly going to tell her so, when Ghirihizzo, coming behind her chair, placed in her hands a sealed packet, which, he said, the

Conte Ricci's page had just transmitted to him, with orders to have it given immediately to the signora Contessa. She knew not why, but she trembled as she opened it. She had no sooner done so, than a piercing shriek escaped her, and she fell back senseless in her chair. The packet contained a miniature of herself, that she had given Bonaventuri, and which he constantly wore, and had, as she knew, worn that night, when she had met him in the myrtle shrubbery, near the lake. It was now pierced with a small Venetian dagger, wreaking with blood, and on the paper that enclosed it was written, in Count Ricci's hand—

“Your friend, the Intendant, has just fallen near the bridge by the lake that borders the myrtle grove; pierced by twenty stilletos, from which, it must be confessed, he defended himself as gallantly as one pair of hands could do. I return you this picture; for, though the person whom it represents is thoroughly worthless, yet the brilliants around it are of much value, and form a small portion of the honour of my family, which it is not in the power of an adventurer to alienate.”

The Duke, who had left his seat to offer his assistance as soon as the Contessa Ricci had fainted, raised the paper she had dropped, and with trembling hands, and an agitated voice, read it aloud.

“Signors!” added Francesco de Medici, looking hastily round, “the Intendant lies murdered in the boschetto of myrtles! I rely upon your exertions to track the villains that have done the deed; and let a price of two hundred francesconi be upon each of their heads, unless indeed it were a matter of private quarrel between the Count Ricci and the deceased,—for with such we have no power.”

Swift as lightning the pavilion was cleared, and the table, with its magnificent decorations, and its now fading flowers, and hastily overturned wine-cups, presented all the chaotic confusion of a deserted banquet.

Bianca, who alone amid all the differently excited multitude had expressed neither grief, horror, nor surprise, beyond a sudden palor more ghastly than that of death, now mechanically, but calmly, unbound the pure and glittering wreath that circled her forehead, and laying it

gently on the table, walked, with a firm step and immoveable features, to the chair where sat her still fainting rival, whose hands the Duke was ineffectually chafing.

“Send for the Contessa’s women,” said she, in a low voice, to a page who stood by; and then, looking steadily for a few minutes at the inanimate features of the once beautiful woman before her, she added, as she took her cold hand in hers,—“this night has wrought a miracle! We are friends now; for we are equally miserable! Poor soul, I pity you! for death is a more cruel and triumphant rival than even you were!” And, with these words, she quitted the pavilion.

Francesco de Medici passed the remainder of that strange eventful night in witnessing and experiencing one of those wild, mysterious, and inexplicable anomalies of nature,—for he passed it in sympathising in the grief of Bianca Cappello for the death of her husband!

CHAPTER X.

“Les effets de la foiblesse sont inconcevables, et je maintiens qu'ils sont plus prodigieux encore que ceux des passions les plus violentes. Elle assemble plus souvent qu'aucune autre passion les contradictoires.”—CARDINAL DE RETZ.

“Love, sole lord and monarch of itself
Allows no ties, no dictates but its own ;
To that mysterious arbitrary power,
Reason points out, and duty pleads in vain.”

Motley's IMPERIAL CAPTIVES.

Two years had elapsed since the last festa in the Villa Strozzi, which had terminated in the assassination of Bonaventuri ; other events had also occurred since then, all more or less of a painful nature to Bianca ; for it appears a part of the system of the harmony of nature, that previous to the advent of some dire and terrible misfortune, we should be prepared as it were for its approach, by a prelude of minor evils.

The young usurper, the Archduke Antonio,

having evinced decided symptoms of idiotcy, had died at the end of a twelvemonth, leaving Bianca to reap the punishment of her crime in her diminished influence, and the constant persecution of the maniac visits of Giovannina Neri, in whose power she was far too deeply to treat her otherwise than with a servile forbearance.

Arianna had bestowed her hand on Ernesto Vasi, who had no ambition but her love, and who steered clear of all the graspings after unhallowed power, which floated the barks that bore men's destinies, in those days, on a sea of blood.

But as Bianca's political position was materially altered, that is, lowered, by the death of the Archduke, and the Cardinal's prospects were consequently again in the ascendant, the Gonfaloniere had virtuously returned the bridal gifts (costly as they were), which the favourite had sent her early friend, Arianna; but her annoyances did not end here, for she felt, to its fullest extent, the reversionary odium of her brother Vittorio's unpopularity, which at

length reached such a climax, from his employment of——

——“Rogues that could extract
Fines out of looks, and death from double meanings ;”

and his practical illustrations of his Venetian principle, of always presuming where doubt was, that crime existed ;* that, to prevent open rebellion, the Grand Duke was obliged to conciliate the people by banishing him from Tuscany.

Peace was thus restored to the state, or rather to the court, for a short time ; but the last act of the tragedy of Bianca's life had still to come ; and as she sat alone, and in tears, in her splendid, but now deserted, villa, listening to the cannon that was firing for the birth of a legitimate Archduke, she thought it had come. But truly “God's ways are not as our ways,” and it is not always when we fear the most, that we have the most reason to fear.

The day after the cannons roared for the birth of her son, the great bell of the Duomo tolled for the death of Joan of Austria. Bianca

* The infamous maxim of the Council of Ten.

was again alone, and that fearful stillness, which is the loudest accuser of the guilty, reigned around ; at length it was broken by the solemn and lugubrious sound of the great bell, for two more days had passed, and the remains of the Grand Duchess were being consigned to the tomb.

“ I did not murder her ! ” said Bianca, covering her eyes with her hands, and then, as if appalled at the hollow hoarse sound of her own voice, she arose, and walked up and down the room.

She passed the day in alternately hoping and fearing she knew not what. She dared not intrude upon the Duke’s privacy,—it might be on his remorse ! by writing to him ; “ but why did he not write to her ? ” She had asked herself this question more than twenty times, but could give it no satisfactory answer.

The evening was closing in, and she had not yet ceased from the match she was walking against her own thoughts, when the door opened, and Ghirihizzo, without uttering a word, and with an unusually sorrowful face, lit two gold Greek lamps, filled with perfumed

naphtha, that stood upon lapis-lazuli pedestals, and placing a packet, sealed with the royal arms, in Bianca's hand, instantly withdrew.

"Why so large?" said she, growing pale, and turning the packet in every direction; "it is parchment too! but still the address is in the Duke's own hand. I—I—feel—ill—faint—I will not read it till to-morrow!" and flinging it on a table, she sank down upon a couch. "But, no! no!" added she, "this is folly—some official etiquette that he is obliged to observe: deaths are always announced to one's nearest and dearest ceremoniously,"* and so saying, she rushed rather than walked to the table, and seizing the packet tore it open.

She had no sooner glanced her eye over its contents, than, crumpling it convulsively in her clenched hand, she stood as if she had suddenly looked upon a Medusa, and been turned to stone!

This packet contained an official order, legally drawn up, but signed with awful legi-

* It is the custom in Italy, among the nobles, to announce a death or marriage in their families by sending round printed papers to their acquaintance informing them of the event.

bility by Francesco de Medici, "for the banishment for life of Bianca Capello, from Tuscany generally, and Florence especially, to take place in eight days from the date thereof."

The fact was, that Francesco,—like all persons of weak minds, shallow heads, and small hearts,—was not only apt to fall into the error of thinking the reverse of wrong, right; but was always eventually influenced by the argument, or even sophistries of the last speaker, from being in himself totally incapable of logically weighing and comparing facts, and from having no sense of justice to appeal to in the summing up of his own internal evidence. No sooner, therefore, had death canonized into a saint the wife of whom he had made a martyr, than his feeble-minded remorse dictated to him, that the surest way to appease the manes of Joan, would be to transfer the cruelty and injustice which he had in life exercised towards her to her rival; and his brother the Cardinal was not slow, under the cloak of religious exhortation, of taking advantage of this frame of mind, to achieve the disgrace of one whom he so cordially detested as Bianco Capello; but

all his zeal might have proved fruitless, had not his infant nephew—his brother's long-wished-for heir—followed its mother to the grave three days after its birth ;—a circumstance which the Cardinal did not fail to work up into a judgment, with which he duly terrified the Duke into a belief that his only hope of salvation depended upon his banishing his mistress. But, alas ! if to every piece of misfortune there is some attendant good, so to every good fortune there is some attendant evil ; and it was therefore impossible that Ferdinando de Medici should have brought his brother to such a pious and repentant state of mind, without that mind going of its own accord still further, and wishing to unburden itself in confession : but unfortunately the Cardinal, both from his consanguinity, and his position now as heir apparent, could not be his confessor ; and Cardinal Dragoni, who *was*, (being latterly, for reasons best known to himself, entirely in Bianca's interest), it was expedient, above all things, to keep away from the Duke ; consequently, whenever the latter urged his wish to confess, his brother exhorted him to wait till the source of

his most flagrant sins was removed, and that then he would be in a more proper frame of mind for so holy a purpose ;—and hence the brief time of preparation allotted to Bianca in her order of banishment. As soon as her paralyzed blood again began to flow, and her muscles to lose their spell-bound rigidity, the thought of Giovanina Neri, and her intercourse with Magini, made her (in that catching at phantoms which the wretched are ever prone to) resolve to seek the old woman in her usual haunt, the cavern of the grotto. So, concealing the fatal parchment in her bosom, and hastily putting on a mantle, she rushed into the gardens. There was no moon, but myriads of stars glittered in the deep blue sky above her, and, as she hurried onwards with that preternatural buoyancy which desperation gives, she felt as if by her simple volition she could have scaled the skies, and plucked another destiny from the brightest of them !

When she reached the grotto, she called in vain upon Giovannina, for she was only answered by the echos of her own voice ; “ If I only knew where she lived I would go to her.”

“Hush,” said a voice, “speak low, or rather be silent, and listen to what I have to say, for time presses.”

Bianca turned to the direction from whence the voice came, and beheld Dragoni, not in his Cardinal's robes, but in the poor and much-worn dress of a mendicant monk ;—a small dark lantern which he held in his hand he placed on the rustic table as he spoke.

“I am aware,” he commenced, in hurried accents, but a subdued tone, “of the order of banishment you have received within the last hour, as is all Florence, for you may be sure the Cardinal de Medici and the Gonfaloniere did not let the grass grow over their triumph ; the Duke still refuses me admittance, but I have written him a letter, highly approving of the step he has taken, and the repentance it evinces,—for it would ruin all if I seemed your partizan, since my great object is to gain an interview with the Duke, for which reason I have urged on him the necessity of confession. This interview once obtained, I shall tell him that, though he is right to banish you, he is wrong not to take leave of you in a spirit of

Christian charity. In order to do so he must see you. This great point once accomplished, I leave the rest to you. Now do you understand?"

"I do," replied Bianca.

"But remember," pursued the Jesuit, "the conditions,—once Grand Duchess of Tuscany, you pledge yourself ever to place Venice and its political intrigues at my disposal, as far as you, through your position, can become possessed of them; for by this lure alone have I brought Philip of Spain over to your interests; and should you ever feel any womanish weakness on the score of patriotism, summon to your councils the injuries and insults you have received from the senate and republic of Venice, and the vengeance that you owe them. For all the rest nature has absolved you, for both your father and the Patriarch of Aquilea sleep with their ancestors. Now return to the villa, enact the masque of meek submission, by ordering the preparations for your departure, and before the appointed day arrives, I promise you that you shall have to counterorder them."

Bianca was about to reply, but Ignatius

waved his hand, and taking the lantern, disappeared as noiselessly as he had come. Cheered by his prophetic promise, and relieved from the turmoil of action by the negative line of conduct he had enjoined her, she retraced her steps to the house, much more slowly, and infinitely more calmly than she set out.

She had no sooner entered the gallery leading from the vestibule, than she perceived the figure of a woman closely veiled ; but before she had time to ask any questions, the veil was off and the arms of Arianna were round her neck. As soon as their mutual tears had sufficiently subsided to allow them to speak, Bianca was the first to do so.

“ You are not aware, then, of my disgrace,—my banishment ?” said she.

“ It is because I am aware of it, that you see me here,” replied Arianna.

“ And do you not fear the contamination of such an atmosphere ?” rejoined Bianca, with the ungrateful hauteur of momentary irritability.

“ Perfect love casteth out fear,” said Arianna, “ and I did love you dearly when you were innocent ; I mourned over you when you were

guilty ; but the pity I feel for you now that that guilt has met its punishment, makes me forget that it ever existed ; for the heart that is filtered through sorrow and repentance only becomes the more pure and holy for its former corruption."

"Do not deceive yourself," said Bianca, shaking her head mournfully, "there is a corruption that cannot be purified, a sin that cannot repent ; the service of the fiend is freedom, till he has thrown over the lost souls of his subjects the fetters of despair ! But who can loosen those ?"

"God !" replied Arianna, "but, dear, dearest Bianca, it is you who deceive yourself, it is ambition !—that leprosy of nations, that plague-spot of souls, that is destroying you. The craving for what is beyond us was the first dark progenitor of crime and sorrow ; in seeking to equal the power of God, the angels fell ; in aspiring to his knowledge, man fell ; but in presuming to make errata or additions to our destinies, which the Almighty has graven on the tablets of eternity, we draw down upon ourselves the avenging fires of heaven. Be

warned them in time, it is only in sin that there is ~~no~~ hope,—leave it, and hope is instantly visible in the horizon! Remember the beautiful eastern legend,—which is no fable,—that though the gates of Eden are of rock, and their bars of adamant, yet the first tear of true repentance that falls upon them, they open wide.”

“Alas!” said Bianca, bursting into a flood of tears; “I have gone too far—I am pledged too deep! I cannot go back even if I would! I am not alone in my sin;” (who is?) “and were I now, at the eleventh hour, to retract, my destruction would be the penalty.”

“And what,” said Arianna, “is the destruction of a poor perishable body, which brings with it but one certainty into life—that of death!—compared to the destruction of the soul, which is for an eternity?”

“What would you have me do?” asked Bianca, irresolutely.

“Return with me to Venice, and seek that peace in seclusion, and the companionship of true hearts (their rarity might tempt you), that experience must have taught you is certainly

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neither to be found in ambition, nor in the
it entails."

"Arianna, you have never loved,"
Bianca, hanging her head, and having reced
to an unworthy subterfuge.

"I have loved,—but of that I am ashamed
I do love,—and in that I glory! Poor Bianca
it would have been well for you if you
had loved!—but you never did love Francesco
de Medici. But, come—come! we lose time.
Ernesto is waiting for me in the street,
must have your answer:—for I dare not return
my visit, for fear of my uncle's vengeance."

Finding that Bianca was still silent, Arianna
continued: "Oh! if my heart could speak
you instead of my tongue, you would not
could not—resist it; for you would know
it had but two feelings—love and fear—for

"If an angel were to speak to me,
Bianca, rising, and replacing Arianna
upon her head; ("and if you are not one, I
I shall never see one), it would be no use
bargain has been struck and my soul has
too long. I feel a power that you cannot
—and God forbid you ever should,—

impels me forward, even to destruction, and which I must obey ! Farewell then, dear Arianna ! if I cannot benefit from your kindness, neither can I forget it :—for your goodness is as that of heaven, which, though faultless itself, has yet so much more mercy than justice, that it pities even if it cannot save.”

Here the monks of Santa Maria Novella chaunting the *De Profundis*, in the Via della Scala, in commemoration of the Grand Duchess’s funeral, warned Arianna to depart.

“ Farewell then for ever ! ”

“ Not for ever !—oh, say not for ever ! ” cried Bianca, as she fell upon her knees and took the hand of her first and last—her only friend.

“ For ever ! ” repeated Arianna, breaking from her with a convulsive sob.

“ Yes—yes—I feel the ice upon my heart,—it is for ever ! and I am now indeed alone ! ” said Bianca, rising, and riveting her eyes on the door through which Arianna had passed.

* * * * *

That day week Bianca Cappello was to quit Florence. Horses and sumpter mules filled the

Via della Scala ; but few bipeds hovered near the now dismantled Villa Strozzi. The Gonfaloniere, it is true, had paid the ceremonious insult of a farewell visit ; but at eleven o'clock the Cardinal Dragoni came, to conduct the discarded favourite to the Pitti,—for the Grand Duke had consented to a farewell interview. Dressed in black velvet, with no ornaments, yet never had Bianca, after her most studied and splendid toilettes, looked so beautiful. Even Ignatius could not help exclaiming,

“ ’Twill do ! you cannot fail ! the heart of the Grand Duke can never resist you ! ”

As they traversed the gardens of the Boboli (for they had purposely chosen the most public route), even the people, whose worst enemy Bianca had been, were moved to pity by her wondrous beauty ; while the courtiers, whom she had showered benefits upon, kept studiously out of the way,—which she having remarked to her companion, as they approached the palace, he replied,

“ Let them : for see, the Duke has already walked twice to the window,—and this impa-

tience,—anxiety,—nervousness,—call it what you will—looks well.”

When they had reached the second landing of the great staircase, they met the Cardinal de Medici coming out of his brother's closet. Bowing coldly to Bianca, he said that it was the Duke's wish, that Ignatius should wait without, to reconduct the signora,—for, as he had some state papers of importance to sign, the interview could not be long.”

An almost imperceptible smile played round Bianca's mouth, as she returned the Cardinal's cold salutation with one equally frigid, and turned down the corridor to the right, till she reached the Duke's cabinet, which is now called the ‘Camera di Marte,’ Chamber of Mars), on the ceiling of which was, and is, a fresco of Cosimo Primo,—as a young warrior leaping out of a boat, spear in hand, while Mars assists him by darting lightning at his enemies. Here she entered, and the door closed after her; while Dragoni remained without, feeling, and almost looking, as formidable as if he was guarding the Hesperides.

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At length an hour elapsed, but no Bi returned.

“ This looks well ! ” thought Ignatius.

On the contrary: “ This delay bode good,” thought Ferdinando de Medici, and shuffled up to the door, his hand filled papers ; but all he said was,

“ Really your Eminence must be tired of your post ; this parting is of the longest.”

“ Unaccountably so ! ” replied the J with one of those shugs that diplomat stand sponsor to every thing, without ple themselves to any thing.

“ I think the Duke had better be informed how time goes. What think you ? ”

“ Your Eminence may certainly take the eternal privilege of breaking in upon his business’s privacy ; but I dare not,” said Dr

The Cardinal de Medici laid his hand on the lock of the door—then withdrew it, then, for the second time, turned it. But there was a counter force within ; for the door opened from the other side, and a servant appeared with a small gold salver in each hand—each salver containing a letter, which,

bow, he presented to the two Cardinals. They were both from the Grand Duke, and contained only a few lines each: that to the Cardinal Ferdinando announced that his brother would transact no official business till the following week; and that to the Cardinal Dragoni, that he was forthwith to see the villa Strozzi set in order, and counteract the preparations for Bianca's departure.

Ferdinando de Medici's hand fell with the letter clasped in it, while looking with a sort of dream-like bewilderment in Dragoni's face, he said, "What does this mean?"

The Jesuit, copying with such inimitable exactness his companion's gesture, intonation, and surprise, that he might at that moment have been taken for a mirror and an echo, gave back the question, and said—"What does it mean?"

It meant,—unless, as Seneca avers, that all history is a lie—that Bianca Cappello was privately married, before that day month, to Francesco de Medici!

CONCLUSION.

“L’histoire est toute différente de la po
 besoin de tous les dieux : quand il veut pein
 il lui faut la tête et les yeux de Jupiter, la poi
 la bouclier de Mars. L’historien peint
 comme il étoit.”—LE PRESIDENT DE THOU.

FRANCESCO DE MEDICI having a
 private marriage with Bianca
 Philip the Second of Spain, and
 reasons already known to the
 countenance and protection, he no
 it to the Doge and Republic of V
 that his intention was to all
 them by the closest possible t
 publicly espousing a daughter of
 Whereupon (so true a prophe
 Bernardini), the same magistr
 exiled Bianca Cappello fifteen

and set a price upon her husband's head, now hastened to overwhelm her with honours ! For by a declaration of the Pregadi, of the 16th of June, 1579, she was named not only a genuine, but an especial daughter of the Republic. Two ambassadors, accompanied by four-and-twenty nobles, were despatched to Florence to solemnize at one and the same time, the more than regal splendour of her marriage, and the adoption of San Marco : which double ceremony was celebrated on the 12th of October, 1579.

Such was the extraordinary pomp of these nuptials, that they cost the state three hundred thousand ducats ; and that at a time when debt and calamity of every kind weighed down the people. Among the foremost in their demonstrations of loyalty on this occasion, were the heroes of the wine-bath, at the villa Strozzi ; all of whom went to an enormous expense in the decorations and construction of splendid mythological cars. So that Florence, for the time being, was turned into a perfect Olympus ; and even Jupiter himself must have felt satisfied that, upon the score of profligacy,

he and his celestial subjects lost nothing by their terrestrial representatives.*

Twelve months after these bridal festivities, the Grand Duke and Duchess retired to the then favourite villa of Poggio Cajano, about ten miles from Florence. The house itself (with perhaps the exception of that of the Carregi de Medici) was the least handsome of all the Grand Ducal villas; but the grounds, which, strange to say, are detached from the villa, are very beautiful, and abounding in most harmonious nightingales.

It was in this retreat that the Cardinal de

* A description of these festivities, with plates, published at the time (*In Firenze, Nella Stamperia de Giunti, 1579*) is still extant, and is entitled,

“Feste Nelle Nozze

Del Serenissimo Don Francesco Medici
Granduca Di Toscana, Et della Serenissima
Sua consorte La Signora Bianca Cappello.

Composte da M. Raffaello Gualterotti.”

Then follows a fulsome Epithalamium, bearing the title of

“Vaghezze sopra Pratolino, composte Dal Signor
Raffaello Gualterotti—Al Serenissimo Don Francesco Medici
Secondo Granduca Di Toseano,”

And spoken by the said Signor Gualterotti, from his mythological car of love, drawn by geese!—Motto,

“’Ove, ’l piacer mi spinge.”

Medici's long stubborn hostility to Bianca, so far yielded, as to accept his brother's and her invitation to visit them. Accordingly, towards the sunny noon of a bright autumnal day, the ponderous coach of the Cardinal might be seen with its numerous suite of nobles and men-at-arms, drawing up, at the double flight of steps at the base of the stone terrace at Poggio Cajano, where Ferdinando de Medici and the Gonfaloniere alighted.

There were not wanting those among the courtiers to note, how leisurely the Cardinal ascended the steps, although the Duke was already on the terrace ready to greet him, braving the noon-day sun, which a violet silk awning scarcely tempered. But, however leisurely the Cardinal had walked up the steps, this apparent indifference was amply atoned for by the cordiality of manner with which he embraced his brother, who led him into the large gallery (now a billiard-room), which opens out upon the terrace. Here the Grand Duchess advanced to meet him; but there was a sort of defensive politeness in both their manners, which bore a striking analogy to the fresco of

two dogs, which may still be seen on the walls, one of which bears in its mouth a placard, with this inscription on it :

“ SI LATRABITIS, LATRABO.”*

Nevertheless, after the ice was once broken, each seemed to vie with the other who should be the most urbane, not to say cordial ; and Bianca herself, taking the Cardinal's proffered arm, led him round the terrace, to a small iron door (which is now walled up, though the outline of it is still visible), but which then conducted up a winding staircase, to a suite of apartments opening on a terrace at the top of the house, which commanded an extensive view, and were considered the pleasantest in the villa ; and moreover, by means of this staircase, ingress and egress could be had to and from these rooms, without the necessity of passing through the house. These apartments were now consigned to the Cardinal, who was hospitably begged to consider the house as his own, without the Spanish injunction, never to forget that it was another's.

* If ye will bark, I will bark.

After dinner, the day was passed in various 'alfresco' amusements about the grounds, which lasted till the brilliant light of a harvest moon reminded them it was time to return to supper. In those days the banqueting-hall at Poggio Cajano was below stairs, where the theatre now is. Ghiriluzzo, whose province it was always to carry a large gold bason full of ice into the hall for the wine, now entered, with his glittering burden, and proceeded round the table to drop a piece of the crystal luxury into each cup.

As he entered, he thought he had perceived some one leave the room by an opposite door; but the lamps were scarcely lit, and the light was uncertain; at all events, the circumstance made so little impression upon him, that he would not have given it a second thought, as he went round singing the *refrain* of a then popular comic song—

“ Non avete vergogna di darmi
Una carogna di questa sorta ? ”

and then continued imitating the noise of the cracking of a whip, as if chastising the sorry beast in question, till Ugolino put his hand upon his arm, and said—

“ Stop, Ghiriluzzo !—look well to the Duchess’s cup, aye, and to the wine too, for I thought I heard a hand move stealthily over the Benvenuto Cellini vase that always stands between the Duke and Duchess.”

“ But my good fellow,” said the dwarf, “ if thou heardest a hand, thou must more surely have heard a foot, and yet there’s no one but we twain in the hall.”

“ No, I heard no foot ; for if there was any one, they were here before me ; and when I thought I heard this hand, I went out by the nearest door to seek for you.”

“ That was foolish,” said Ghiriluzzo ; “ for I do remember me now, that as I entered I thought I saw some one go out at the opposite door ;—but first for the cups.—No, most assuredly there is nothing in them,” said the dwarf, removing the ice with a spoon, and examining the cups at the light, “ or the gold would have been black ere this. Now for the wine,” continued he, pouring a cup from the Duke’s flagon, and looking at it minutely athwart the light, as he transferred it to the cup. “ No, never drank better wine in my

life, and never desire to drink worse;—it is all right, friend Ugo, thy fears have got on the blind side of thee, boy, that's all."

"I hope so," said Ugolino, with a sigh; "but I had horrid dreams last night,"

"What! that I was turned into a giant, and that consequently thou couldst not command our august ear, as thou ever hast done, and ever shall do."

"Ghiriluzzo! Ghiriluzzo!" cried a page, "the Grand Duchess wants you."

"Blessings on her sweet face, may she never want more, and even that little she shall not want long; but for thou," added the dwarf, tapping Ugolino's arm, and assuming a ludicrously consequential air, which was lost upon the poor blind boy, "count ever upon our distinguished favour," and so saying, he cleared the table at a bound, as if life were a thing that time could not wither, nor death uproot.

The banqueting-hall at Poggio Cajano resounded to the echos of conviviality; and which flowed the most brightly, the wine, or the conversation, it would not have been easy to

determine ; but certain it was, that both the Cardinal de Medici and the Gonfaloniere were peculiarly brilliant.

“ Poor Tasso,” said the former, addressing Magini, who sat next to him, “ he had better have accepted the Grand Duke’s offer ; than have ended his days, as he is now likely to do, in a dungeon at Ferrara.”

“ Not so,” replied Magini ; “ he will live to have his merits acknowledged ; but, like many others, just as he attains his wishes, death will dispute the prize.” *

“ Really, signor Magini, said Martin Bernardini, sarcastically, as he leant across the table, “ what think you of entertaining us all, by telling us the exact moment, how, and when, we shall meet our end ? Now do, if you *really* know.”

“ Socrates never wrote any thing,—as he

* As was the case, for Tasso’s ill health preventing his being crowned by the Pope, when he arrived in Rome in the November of 1594, the ceremony was put off till the April of 1595 ; on the 25th of which month, the day appointed for his coronation, the poet was carried into the monastery of St. Onofrio for the purpose, and there he died.

modestly affirmed he had too much value for paper to do so,—and I have too much value for time to tell *all* I know; but if I *did*,” said Magini, fixing his large lustrous eyes full on the Gonfaloniere, “I doubt the signor Bernardini would be the *least pleased*, of all present, with the accuracy of my knowledge.”

The Gonfaloniere’s cheek blenched, his lips quivered, and he reeled in his seat, like one seized with a sudden giddiness.

“Look to the Gonfaloniere,—he is not well,” said the Duke.

“Perfectly, I thank your Highness,” replied Martin Bernardini,—recovering himself—“but the night is hot—very hot,” added he, filling a large goblet of water.

“It is hot,” said the Duke, rising from table, and offering his hand to Bianca; “and, moreover, it wanes apace. But at all events, signors, as we must be astir by times for the wild boar chase to-morrow, we had best to bed early. So good night to all. Brother, good night—Signor Magini, ‘*felici notte.*’”

“Farewell! your Highness.”

“No—not farewell,” said Bianca, with a

smile, as she placed her small white hand in his, "but 'a rivederla.'"

And, so saying, the Duke and Duchess left the hall, and were soon after followed by their guests.

The deep-toned clock of Poggio Cajano had tolled the second hour after midnight, when the household were summoned from their beds by the sudden and severe illness of the Grand Duke. When the two physicians always in attendance, entered the royal bed chamber, they found the Duchess supporting his head against her shoulder, while he was writhing in the most excruciating agony. And, in answer to the physician's questions of where he felt the pain? he could only gasp out at broken intervals,

"——I am—all—one pain!"

And these pains he continued to feel till about four in the morning, when he fell into an uneasy and feverish sleep, from which he awoke worse instead of better. This was on the morning of the 8th of October. Bianca and the Cardinal never quitted his bed-side. But, on the 10th, the Duchess herself was

seized with the same complaint; only accompanied by more horrible paroxysms of delirium, once—and only once—she had asked for Ghuriluzzo: but, although they did not tell her so, the poor dwarf had died in the most agonizing convulsions, the morning after the Grand Duke had been taken ill. Nothing could equal the unceasing kindness and attention of the Cardinal de Medici to both the sufferers:—but all was in vain; for on the morning of the 19th of October, at four o'clock, just eleven days from that on which he had been taken ill, Francesco de Medici expired; and the day after, at three in the afternoon, Bianca breathed her last!

Ere Ferdinando de Medici had thrown off his ecclesiastical habit, to assume the reins of government, Cardinal Dragoni had not only quitted Poggio Cajano, but Tuscany, for Rome, accompanied by his sister, signora della Torre, with whose assistance (under a feigned name), he hoped to serve his master, Philip of Spain, at the expense of the Venetian republic, as well at the Vatican, as he had done at Florence. Three hours after the news of the Grand Duke

and Duchess's death had reached the capital, a hideous old woman was seen running through the streets, vociferating that they had been poisoned ; and when the authorities, by the command of the Gonfaloniere, had orders to seize her, she eluded them all, by jumping from the Ponte Carraia into the Arno, beneath whose muddy waves she perished. But still the rumour ran that the Grand Duke and Duchess had been poisoned. In vain their bodies were publicly opened ; in vain the most natural causes were assigned for their death—some say proved—still a suspicion of the foul stain of murder attaches to the memory of the otherwise good Ferdinando de Medici, whose reign was one of the most glorious for Tuscany. His hatred for his sister-in-law, which he has immortalized, by styling her, even in some of his public edicts, “*LA DETESTABILE BIANCA*,” with some wise historians, has been converted, or rather perverted, into a proof of his having poisoned her. Whereas, *I*, knowing the relief even these three words of abhorrence must have been to him, believe him innocent of ALL DEEDS.

The night after the royal funeral, a solitary mourner passed through the church of San Lorenzo, at Florence, into the Cappella de' Medici, and, kneeling before the tomb of Bianca Cappello, prayed and wept for half the night. There is no contamination in the grave—no adulation in tears. The mourner was Arianna.

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